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ASHES

VOLUME TWO

GENII LINGUARUM

GROWTH OF THE SOIL by Knut Hamsun
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STEFAN ZEROMSKI

ASHES

VOLUME
TWO

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TRANSLATED FROM THE POLISH BY
HELEN STANKIEWICZ ZAND



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ASHES

VOLUME TWO

25. Lowlands

ONE of the first days of September 1804, Raphael Olbromski came out of the forests and dales and began to walk towards the lowlands. He had spent more than a year in prison in the Oravian castle as a common outlaw, although he had not committed the crimes of which he was accused. In the course of the first few months he maintained a scornful silence and would not even give his name. His refusal to speak was, according to the new Austrian procedure of the year 1803, an offence in itself and he was punished for it with hard imprisonment. Yet he could not do otherwise. He would have had to reveal the whole nakedness of his misfortune, uncover the mystery of Helen's death, tell the story of her love and death. He would have had to unearth the whole secret, disgrace after death her who perished through his fault, just to save his life, the life so odious now. . . . He told himself that it was better as it was—to lie in prison on his litter of straw until some end arrived. Thus, scorning death itself, he awaited it indifferently. But death did not come. It sent instead its handmaiden—sickness. Prison typhus seized him in its clutches and held him as long as it wished. In the course of this sickness the affair came to light suddenly and simply. Soldiers tracking the Novotar bandits discovered Raphael's passport and some of his things while inspecting the hut of the husbandman from whom Raphael had rented the cottage of his happiness. The thrifty husbandman concealed the money carefully against all events, but cared little about the papers. The judge who tried the cases of outlaws in the nearest Hungarian district received these papers after a considerable lapse of time; he guessed immediately, how-

ever, that they belonged to the mysterious prisoner. The proof of the identity of his person was now only a question of time. When, during the examination, the judge pronounced his name, Raphael trembled and fixed his pain-blinded eyes upon the magistrate. A while later, however, when he was asked the whereabouts of the woman with whom, according to the testimony of the husbandman, he had lived in the mountains, he lied shamelessly, with the simplicity and candour of a child, and said that the woman was a girl of light conduct whom he had met in the streets of Cracow. Tiring of her, he turned her out. Where she was at present he did not know. Doubtless she was plying her trade in the bagnios of the city. His disguise as a bandit he explained easily and clearly, skilfully altering the details of the actual happening. He was released in September. As a nobleman, he did not receive the customary allotment of cudgels which the Hungarian code provided for its prison wards by way of leave-taking. Of his effects he was given his Prussian passport and a few tatters of bandit raiment, which it was impossible to put on. The prison guard, out of pity, gave him what he could spare without regret: a pair of worn, swashbuckling Hungarian boots, with high leggings, an official casquette, bereft of insignia, and a short and threadbare coachman's spencer. Thus attired, Raphael took a crook in his hand and left the prison. Having passed the iron door of the old castle, he did not stop to look back. He made off like a fox whose wound was fairly healed. With all the breath in his lungs, through the vales of the Váh, on and on! He was utterly worn, exhausted in every inch of him. His face was yellow, with livid, blue-grey spots, bloated, swollen; his hair had thinned out and a growth of beard covered his face. He was so weak that his legs bent under him, his knees sank to the ground at frequent intervals, while his palms burned with a constant fire, as though

he were holding two live flames. One thing only remained strong and immovably hard within him: the desire to flee, to get away. He tore on without halting. At times he would rest on the wagon of a Slovak climbing the hill for wood and shorten his journey by a jot. Sometimes he would creep unnoticed to the coupling pole of a Jewish britzka and make thus several hundred steps. With indescribable labour, through mountain passes and ravines, he limped his way to a town. He intended to rest here, but he saw a stone pillar at the road-side, a kind of pillory, with chained rings for the arms and neck of the offender; so in the night he took again to his heels. Across open country, rarely asking for the road, he pushed on toward Cracow. He shunned the highways, the wider roads, the more populous villages, for fear of being recognized and stopped by someone. If the night was warm, not rainy, he slept in ricks of hay, in heaps of after-grass, under stacks of grain. He fed himself as he could. He would stop at isolated rectories, and, pretending to be a wandering Slovak going to Poland after work, he would secure a bowl of porridge or a lump of bread. He ate somewhat better in a certain monastery, where, in addition to food, he was given a night's lodging indoors; after that he approached men only in the direst extremity. He succeeded several times in digging up some turnips or potatoes in a far-lying field and in roasting them at day-break in a juniper grove. A few times, in extremest hunger, he entered a peasant's cottage. The word of prayer directed to a socage-doing cottager could not pass his lips. And yet he had to beg and ate peasant dumplings-and-milk, invited to the common bowl. He narrated artfully invented tales to the simple folk, sad, ingeniously moving narratives, and watched the gaping mouths of his listeners with keenest relish.

At length the uplands began to grow lower, the valleys

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wider and shallower. Under billows of mist appeared dim, hazy plains. . . .

Raphael greeted them with ineffable joy. His hatred of mountains was now equal to their height. The lowlands held forth a promise of something better, of change, of hope. . . .

It was a cloudy day. A layer of thick, vaguely outlined clouds obscured the heavens. Their sullen hue pursued and swallowed the sickly blotches of light which slipped out charily here and there. A north-west wind now rose, now died, tossing bits of grain over the dry and withered fields, over empty stretches of stubble, black and brown with milfoil. Tall, thick clumps of thistle still remained in the fields to be stripped by the wind of their greying shag and to have it blown over the earth. The slender birch-trees standing there and yon still wore their summer leaves, but they were aged and shrivelled, and bent without virgin grace when the wind puffed up their tattered dress. Occasionally one still came across a field covered with blood-red buckwheat leaves or the black stalks of the potato plant.

He was walking through a sterile, sandy region. He dragged himself through dry woods, over unmeasured heaths, covered as far as the eye could reach with lovely purple bloom, over dry mosses, rustling crisply under the foot. At times the forest would open and reveal tawny reaches of sand, overgrown with dark clumps of juniper.

A narrow trail wormed its way through a dense thicket. On it were two stale ruts furrowed in the sand and long beaten down by the rain. They led to a distant village, with straw-thatched cottages, drab as the sand and the moss. At times, in the midst of this stretch, as empty as though it existed only to provide the rain which passed over it with a place to fall, a little town would rise from the sand-dunes, a diminutive hamlet consisting of a church spire and a cluster

of yellowish barns, standing in close array. Over their roofs a few great trees, stripped and torn at the base. Beyond, once again the mist-shrouded landscape. Accustomed to the haze the eye can now distinguish in it misty blurs of forest, bluish bands of nearer woods, gaunt skeletons of elms and poplars standing watch over some lonely house. The dead silence is broken only by the distant barking of some miserable dog complaining of its hapless lot in a sour, hoarse treble. Now and then a passing crow is mortally frightened by the unusual figure of the wanderer and, screeching, glides in panic to the nearest wild.

This misty country-side of the colour of clouds, this empty waste, gathered the traveller to its placid bosom. Its arms had the feel of something native, homely, calm. He drew its air into his lungs and could not sate his eyes with its sight. He would stop a hundred times. Not infrequently, shading his eyes with his hand to shield them from the sun, he would gaze and gaze. He felt the almost physical caress of this sight. He felt warmer. The spell of the curse was breaking. If only he could, in addition to this, hear his own Sandomierian speech, his native idiom, if he could only reach the parts where the day was his day and the night his night!

At a certain point the little bypath brought him out on a populous highway, a wide, paved road. He walked swiftly down a side path, the hard, narrow trail of poor folk. He did not spare his feet. He was smirched to the knees, lashed by the winds, chilled to the marrow of his bones, and hungry as a homeless dog. At frequent intervals the highway thudded under the rumbling weight of a four-horse carriage or a Cracovian britzka; now and then a light little chaise winged its fleet career. Heavy, loaded wagons passed, and becurled Jews trudged along with hired cart and nag. Towards evening, in an open field, at the side of the road, appeared a



stone inn, where almost all travellers stopped for a longer stay. Without much debate, although he did not have so much as a broken farthing, Raphael cleared the sloppy mud-pools at the entrance and stepped into the main room. It was a huge affair, damp, cold, and empty. Wide benches and heavy tables on crossed legs stood under the walls. One corner was taken up by a bar, with beer, brandy, and a motley collection of rusty sausages behind it. In the subtle half-shadow of the beer-kegs a scrawny little man flitted about, a strange figure, with the furtive, darting eyes of a perjurer. This individual preserved a dogged silence and was as angry as though all his guests were members of Carpathian bands.

Raphael made a careless motion in the direction of the tavern-keeper and seated himself comfortably in a dark corner. The smell of the sausages was twisting his entrails and throwing him into fits of starving nausea, while the odour of the whisky made his head swim and reel with vertigo. A few rustics sat in the tavern. A coachman and a liveried servitor were playing with a greasy pack of cards, wrangling and quarrelling. Money lay in front of them. At their elbows stood half-quart mugs of beer. A fat roast of pork smoked on a platter, and whisky glinted glassily in a green flagon.

Olbromski underwent spasms of post-typhous hunger. He was sure that another moment and he would undertake something: he would snatch the meat from the coachman or pull down the sausages hanging in the shadows of the bar and swallow them in the twinkling of an eye. . . . He continued to sit motionless however, like a hawk on a pole, and cast his eyes about in search of something upon which he might pounce.

At a certain moment, quite unconscious of what was happening to him or of what he was doing, he rose leisurely and, yawning hypocritically from a distance, boldly asked the



innkeeper: "I say there—my friend—have you anything there to eat?"

The host interrupted his wineglass activities and, picking his teeth with criminal nonchalance, answered the query with another question: "And what would you, there—my friend—like to have?"

"Well, something of meat. Meat! Boiled, fried . . ."

The innkeeper was silent for a moment as though he were mentally recounting his list of dishes; he next measured the vagabond from head to toes and replied: "No. I have no meat. Neither boiled nor fried."

"And what are they eating over there? Where did they get it?"

"What are they eating? They are eating boiled meat."

"You will give me at once whatever you have and be done with it," Raphael bellowed in a commanding voice. "Did you hear me?"

"I did."

"Well, then, be quick about it! I have no time."

The tavern-keeper was assiduously wiping a glass.

"You think perhaps that I haven't the wherewith to pay for your dirty mess," Raphael added, with contempt as sincere as though his pockets were full of ducats, seemingly quite oblivious of the fact that he had not one penny.

"I'm not thinking anything," the innkeeper muttered. "Pay is pay. What will you have?"

"Give me whatever you have, only be quick!"

He said this with the most perfect calm, without even a thought for what would come next. Only to eat! To eat a pile of smoking meat, of bread that crackles between one's teeth!

The players, without interrupting their game, turned their eyes in the direction of the fiery ragamuffin. With smiles of

indulgence and ironical winking of eyelids they exchanged some whispered half-words about him.

The innkeeper went out through a small door into the mysterious stamping-grounds beyond and his place was taken by a pale little girl in a dirty pinafore and worn-out shoes. Raphael came up to the players with a swift, decided step and greeted them with a nod much like the gracious, good-humoured nod with which a nobleman, a landowner, might answer the bow of an industrious peasant. The others answered this semblance of a bow in an undecided manner, neither this way nor that, and, continuing their play, they coughed and cleared their throats, not knowing what to do. Raphael glanced at their cards with a hauteur which, despite his efforts, he could not quell.

"A wretched hole, this tavern," he said by way of opening.

"It is that," the coachman answered.

"You are from these parts?" Raphael continued.

"No, I am not."

"From far?"

"Far."

"That is from where?"

"Where are you from?"

"I am coming from the Hungarian border, heading straight for Cracow."

"From the Hungarian border?" the players asked with an accent of respect.

"Yes indeed—from Budapest," he added more quietly.

"A mighty distance! I can't even think where that may be."

"If you knew! One is tired as a dog, and that good-for-nothing doesn't even bring one's food."

"He'll probably be bringing it out any minute."

"I wonder how he prepares it," Raphael said as if to him-



self, looking askance at the side of bacon lying on the platter.

Without asking permission he broke off a lump of bread, cut himself a sizable trencher of meat, and began to examine its flavour swiftly and deliberately. It proved so-so, quite passable in fact. In view of that, he poured himself a glass of whisky and emptying it carelessly, drank to the astounded domestics.

"I am beastly hungry and that clod-pate is dallying there," he complained, going for a better, fatter portion of the pork.

The bread was disappearing down his gullet in vast hunks.

"For whom are you working?" he asked the coachman, helping himself to a second glass from the latter's bottle.

"I am waiting here for my master."

"Who is that?"

"I am waiting with relay horses—" the coachman replied, looking at Raphael's practices in simple-minded bewilderment.

"Where is your master coming from?"

"From Vienna."

"And what the deuce is the name of your master?"

The coachman hesitated for a moment; then, pretending that he did not hear the question, turned to his companions.

"Your deal now . . ."

Olbromski did not insist.

The innkeeper emerged at length from his laboratory carrying a three-legged iron skillet and put before his guest a large piece of "devil's-sausage" sizzling in a bath of black grease and a clod of black bread. Wondrous was the taste and witching the aroma of this dish! Raphael devoured it to the last crumb and wiped the grease with the bread to the last drop, but he did not appease his hunger. The food did, however, give him a certain moral aplomb and he could

now think what to undertake from this point. He began with an inspection of the innkeeper and an appraisal of his strength for the contingency of battle if it should prove expedient to quit the tavern without the conventional leave-taking. He intended to approach the coachmen once more and to turn them in some way to his advantage. He was sidling up to them with this aim in view when suddenly the inn yard was filled with the clatter of an arriving carriage. The coachman and his companion looked through the window and threw themselves pell-mell at the door.

The wanderer entertained the fond hope that he might be able to profit by the confusion and slip out unnoticed, but the circumspect owner of the sausages stood piously at the door and was already bending his spine before the still invisible guest. There remained no other course but to retreat into a shady corner and wait for a smile of fortune.

The door flew open and a tall, slender gentleman, modishly and beautifully dressed, slowly entered the room. His hat, his high boots, his cloak, though muddy and rumpled from the journey, created, in that dingy tavern, an impression of splendour and luxury. The new-comer looked round the room with narrowed eyes and began to ask the servants a thousand detailed questions about his family and home. It was apparent that he was returning from a long journey and after a long absence.

Olbromski looked at him with anguished terror. He recognized the new guest at first glance, but he tried to believe that his eyes were deceiving him. It was Christopher Cedro, his school-mate from Sandomierz, his confidant and friend. A wave of dull shame swept the ex-prisoner, a red-hot grate slipped under his body. A tangled maze of wretchedness fell upon him like a drag-net. Behold, he has lived to suffer the worst thing of all: to meet his former colleague in such

clothing, in such a position, and at such a moment! He could not even flee now, since his disgrace would only become louder and more open. He covered his face with his hands.

In the mean while Christopher Cedro threw off his coat and was walking back and forth through the room putting various questions to his servants. As he marched thus from corner to corner, he noticed Raphael. He turned at once to the innkeeper and asked whether, for the duration of his stay at the inn, he could not be alone. He would pay for it, but he wished to have his dinner without witnesses. The innkeeper leaped up to Raphael and asked for his payment more than emphatically and likewise for his guest to take himself off. The wanderer raised his head slowly and told the man that he did not intend to leave.

"I will pay you when I wish and I will go when I wish, and now be good enough to leave me if you want to keep your eyes sound and your teeth untouched."

The innkeeper screwed up his face and his jaws trembled like a dog's. "Listen, man," he said in a kindly whisper, "go away peacefully or I'll call the farm-hands and have your bones trimmed for good measure. And what would be the good of that?"

A violent revolt at all this misery produced an outburst of determination in the breast of Raphael. With a single upward thrust he struck the innkeeper on the lower jaw with such force that the latter rolled to the very foot of the bar. Raphael rose and came up to Cedro. He stood in the light of the window and asked: "Do you recognize me, Comrade Chris?"

Cedro started back and, taking out a horn-rimmed monocle, began to look at him, his mouth slightly open.

"Chris! Sandomierz, the Vistula, the nocturnal expedition to Zavihost—"



the innkeeper: "Do you have some separate little room here?"

"No, your Worship, I do not."

"In that case—" Raising his voice, he cried out: "I asked, confound it, that everybody leave here. I wish to be alone with my friend. Bring me the valise, then get you out of here!"

Shortly afterwards Raphael saw his friend's linen spread out on the table.

Cedro said: "I scarcely know what to do— It won't do to have my man and the coachman see that you are putting on my things. Perhaps you had better stay in what you have on. Only change your linen as fast as you can."

He turned about and began to watch the door while Raphael changed. He twisted the hideous, rotten rags which he took off into a ball and held them under the skirt of his coat.

"Give that here!" Cedro muttered. "The man will throw it away."

"No!"

"Give it to me. I'll throw it out myself, then—"

"No, I alone can throw this out," Raphael answered with a smile of scathing derision. "These rags are my life up to the present time. Only I myself can cast it off. . . ."

He rose from the table and went out into the yard. At the rear of the shabby tavern he found a manure-pile and threw his vile bundle into it. Having done this, he leaned against the wall and for the space of a short moment thought very deeply. The thought that all this was but a treacherous dream lay on his breast like a plate of granite. He wished to shake it off and to believe in the approaching peace, but he could do this only as a sick man could lift a block of granite. He sighed heavily and returned to his companion. The latter was already preparing to resume his journey.

"You told me," he said, "that you were proceeding to

Cracow. I am rushing on by way of Tarnov, heading straight for home, away from Cracow. But if it is a matter of importance to you, we'll go to Cracow."

"Heaven forbid," cried Olbromski. "I am not longing in the least for sight of Cracow."

"Tell me—were you thinking—that is, did you intend later to return home, to Tarniny?"

Raphael thought deeply. Then he slowly replied: "To tell the truth, I had no intention, of any kind, today, yesterday, the day before—I thought how not to die of hunger beneath some way-side fence."

"Have pity!"

"Certainly, I suppose I shall have to return home."

"Listen here—"

"Although to return home in this remarkable costume—Brr!"

"That's just it!" Christopher cried excitedly.

"But what am I to do? I'm like a corpse. I have gone through a very severe illness—"

"I had the same thing in mind. Listen—come with me!"

"How—to Olshyna?"

"No, not to Olshyna, but straight to my place. I have my own little estate."

"You have? Your own?"

"Yes—Stoklosy."

"Have mercy— I am ashamed to go to my own home; how should I go to yours? What will your father say when he sees me?"

"We will go to Tarnov in the first place. There you will transform yourself into a dandy of the first water. The important thing is not to let the servants know anything. As for my father, you may believe me that he will receive you as

he would his own son. Why, we are cousins. And quite apart from that—Raffie, please—”

He said this in his old, childish voice.

“I should like to, from the bottom of my heart, but consider only—”

“I have considered everything. I tell you that I have my own estate. I live there and I do whatever my heart desires, on my returns from Vienna.”

“Your returns from Vienna? You live there permanently?”

“Permanently? Almost—”

“What are you doing there?”

“What am I doing?” He stretched and his lips curled in a bitter smile. “Doing, I’m not doing anything, but I’m trying—”

“For a young lady?”

“Fortunately, not as yet for a young lady. Although that too will soon fall upon my shoulders.”

“How is that?”

“For the time being, you see, I am trying for a chamberlainship—”

“Nonsense!”

“But apropos— Rumours reached us that you were living in Warsaw, getting in with the best people. Someone even mentioned that you belonged to that riotous company—”

“Yes, I was in Warsaw— But those are old times.”

“Do you intend to return there?”

“To Warsaw? Never!” he cried, with a sullen frown at the thought of Prince Gintult, the freemasons, and their presiding officer.

It occurred to him only now that returning to Warsaw or anywhere within the boundaries of southern Prussia would



expose him to the danger of imprisonment, or, at the very least, a trial, in connexion with the disappearance of Madame de With. At the very thought of prison the blood froze in his veins. Ah yes! To vanish on the distant estate of his friend, to bury himself in its silence, to fall clinging to the ground in some kettle-hole in the fields like a hunted hare. To think of nothing, nothing . . .

He raised his eyes to Chris and said: "If it will cause you no inconvenience, I will go with you with joy, with sincere joy."

"*Voilà*. I like that. Jack, hitch up!"

Soon a comfortable chaise, drawn by a pair of chestnuts, was carrying them over the highway into the grey, forest-veiled distance. Olbromski now had what he had longed for so keenly: he was oblivious of everything. He was covered with his friend's felt coat and shielded from the rain, which was today his personal enemy. He felt neither hunger nor thirst. The measured, delightful motion of the carriage drew the fatigue out of his weary bones.

A rain shower seemed to be gathering and light drops brushed their faces from time to time. A fresh, increasingly sharp wind was blowing. By some strange trick of feeling, Raphael only now began to comprehend the full depth of his misfortune. He felt his wasted legs, encased in the rags which he had begged in the prison, walking over the hard ground. He looked at the clay hummocks and caught glimpses of his abject, grovelling feelings, of the rags which he had thrown on the dung-heap. An unprecedented anger, a mad revolt was gathering within him. With all his soul and all his strength he was seeking the culprit, a prey, a victim for his vengeance. . . .

The lusty horses snorted, tearing briskly over the highway. The backs of the coachman and the lackey rocked

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rhythmically, with a drowsy movement to right and left, in time with the swinging of the carriage. Following the rhythm of these movements, there began to form in the soul of Raphael waves of thought as unstable as the dips of the chaise, waves dependent upon something external, upon the slightest touch, upon the least pulse of the swinging motion. They flowed in long strands, like fitful music, torn, tattered, uncertain of the minute, of the second.

The spreading wings of a dark forest came nearer and nearer, converging from both sides of the road. Twilight was falling when the britzka came to its edge. The highway plunged into its black depths and vanished completely, as though it ended there. The forest was dry, sandy. Its thin, scraggly pines were barely visible in the melancholy gloaming which slowly floated down from all sides. It seemed as though the air were being filled with a drab, bluish smoke which tore the sight of the trees from the eyes. Sadness drooped over this vanishing, uncertain road. A feeling of aversion came over all: the coachman whispered something to the lackey, Cedro stretched and wrapped himself closer in his coat. It was quiet, though high overhead the wind rolled and turned over the tops of the trees, rocking them from right to left. Below, quiet reigned as under the roof and walls of a house. One heard only the ceaseless chirping of late grasshoppers.

Raphael felt his heart contracting and growing numb. For the first time since that dreadful moment, misfortune was ceasing to oppress him. That quiet, impatient chirping seemed to run after him, to catch hold of the swift wheels of the britzka, of the iron shoes of the horses, and to call after him from the ground. . . .



26. The Return

A FEW days later, well after midnight, the two friends were approaching Olshyna. They spent a day in Tarnov, where Raphael transformed himself into an elegant youth; then for almost two days and nights, changing their horses twice, they pressed on to their final destination. For some time they rode along the edge of a river flowing in a narrow valley filled with boulders, sand, and gravel. Only toward evening the carriage came down from the level uplands, from the tree-bare ridges, and descended into the valley of the Visloka. Raphael's nostrils caught the breath of the moisture-laden soil, a breath heavy with the smell of osier and wood. The opposite bank was lost in the grey landscape, and his eyes could not distinguish it. Things had a strangely familiar look. Their way led through long-prosperous villages, densely built, where the pliant osier rewards every nook, every bypath. They sped through alleys of willow and birch, built of trees so massive, so tall and spreading, that they seemed to be the product of a fantastic dream. The lanterns of the carriage threw sudden shafts of light into by-ways, fenced-in yards, and village orchards. From every corner the huge shield-like sunflowers stared at them like frightened peasants' faces gaping over the fence tops. Tall stalky hollyhocks and gaudy dahlias reminded Raphael of the villages on the other side. Just as there, plum-trees sagged under their load of fruit, and overburdened branches, propped with poles and crooks, bent over the passer-by from endless stretches of orchard. Pitcher-shaped pears and beautiful apples flashed amid the thatch roofs. Dry solitary leaves flapped pathetically on the barren trees and filled the heart with a peculiar long-

ing for one's native parts, with anxious care for one's friends and kin.

As they neared Olshyna, Cedro could not keep his place. He rose to his feet, leaned out from one, now from the other side, asked the driver about this or that. At times he jumped out and walked swiftly uphill whistling and singing merrily. Finally, from the top of one of the hillocks they caught sight of a distant cluster of lights.

"They aren't sleeping," Christopher cried in an almost childish treble.

He had no sooner said this, however, than he grew ashamed of this sentimental tenderness of his, and so he added in an artificially cold and jeering tone: "You'll be obliged, my dear, to be present at the ceremonious performance of various tender family scenes, to see them from beginning to end."

The carriage rolled down the hill and came to a stop at the gate. The coachman had not yet come down from his box when the gate flew open with a crash. There was a frantic barking of dogs; men ran about with lanterns, calling and shouting, making for the carriage. A few moments later the two travellers found themselves on the steps of a wide veranda. Christopher threw himself into the arms of someone standing in the shadow. He was whispering the most tender names, returning the most tender kisses. Raphael stood in a corner embarrassed and abashed. He was furious at his friend for these effusions.

"The performance begins," he thought in a rage.

Christopher seized him by the arm and pulled him toward the door. There he presented him to his father saying: "Papa, you have before you the man who saved me from the treacherous torrent of the Vistula. Raffie Olbromski in his own person!"

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"Welcome, welcome." The old gentleman whom Raphael had before him greeted him in the most friendly fashion.

"I pulled him off the road and brought him here by main force."

"Come in, come in, it is very cold outside. Where did you come upon each other? Splendid of you to have come, Master Raphael. I am doubly happy, for we are cousins, even if only distant. I remember your father away back, from the year—let me see . . ."

Raphael saw perfectly how difficult it was for the old gentleman to force himself to the polite words and acts which the occasion required at a moment when he was so absorbed in his son that he stumbled on the door-steps, knocked against the casements, and caught his garments on the corners of the tables. He was a slender man of about sixty, his face wasted with illness, delicate, subtle, and still very beautiful. His head was covered with a smooth, unpowdered wig; his upper lip displayed a small, cropped moustache, lightly touched up with blacking. He was dressed in accordance with the French mode, in silk small-clothes, stockings, and low shoes. His jabot and neckerchief, his lace cuffs, the care of his nails and hands, his manner of holding them on the table, even when his every look and word caressed his son, marked the elder Mr. Cedro as a person of the highest refinement and taste, a man of the best circles. His eyes were dimmed with tears of happiness as he looked and looked at his son, but even then they did not lose their expression of scrutiny and strength. Amid the most affectionate words and the most feeling embraces, his lips uttered commands which the lackeys hovering about the tables carried out instantaneously. The new arrivals were presently conducted to a narrow room adjoining the great hall and seated at a table. They were wait-

ing for their supper when a small door, concealed in a corner behind the china-cabinet, opened suddenly and a young girl of fourteen or fifteen ran out in night *négligé*. She threw herself into her brother's arms.

"Mary!" young Cedro cried in a happy voice.

The young lady raised her head very soon and looked at him with an amusing little smile. After a moment she whispered: "Did you bring it?"

"Of course! And now just look, little giddy-head—"

"I'm so happy."

"You are dressed like the shepherdess Phyllis, and here—I present to you our cousin Raphael Olbromski."

"Our cousin," she echoed in deepest amazement, pushing back her curls and fixing on Raphael a pair of eyes as astounded as if her brother were presenting to her a white bear or a jaguar.

"Come, come, sit at the table!" the father was urging. "You will have enough time tomorrow for all your gossip. Chris, see what they're bringing in!"

The eldest of the lackeys, smiling with happiness as heart-felt as though it were his own son who had returned to his paternal domicile, was solicitously filling Christopher's plate with fruit soup thickened with cream. Confronted with this spectacle, the youth stretched his hands to heaven and cried: "*Garus!* At last, at last. O Germans, if I ever forgive you that for almost a year I have not tasted human food! Germans, nation of philosophers and poor generals! Punish me, O thunder-wielding Jove, deprive me of my hope of a chamberlain's key, tear the heart from my countly breast . . . And do we have potatoes with cracklings too?"

"With the freshest young pork-back," the senior lackey whispered almost into his ear.



Several of the younger looked with pious and slavish satisfaction at the gusto with which their young master imbibed the homely soup.

"Suppose the supposititious chamberlain—I beg your pardon, dear father—" Christopher was mumbling, "suppose your master and lord, returning from distant Germany, were given a 'pandegibber' as well? What do you say to that?"

"It's ready," said the lackey, putting down a fresh plate.

A moment later, with gleaming eyes, Christopher was quartering a *pain de gibier* and winking to Raphael that he must not lose time. The father and the sister looked at the young man in silence and delight. From time to time Mary took her eyes from his face and studied Raphael in a most amusing fashion.

"Raffie! why aren't you eating?" Chris called, falling on his favourite dishes with a greedy knife and fork. "Have pity, don't delay, for I don't vouch for anything. I may eat everything. Now only baked potatoes."

"They are bringing them in."

"I thought that you would finally lose your coachman's tastes in Vienna," his sister taunted him.

"Now only the baked potatoes. What potatoes! Only in Poland, and that in Western Galicia, is this American orphan— The Germans, if they eat at all—"

"You can slander the Germans later, now you must talk, talk. You must have quieted your hunger by now, so begin. I warn you that if you don't tell interesting things, you shan't get any of Aunt Matynia's cookies."

"I'll tell anything, only give me Aunt Matynia's cookies, a lot of them, as though I were sick. Raffie, you haven't lived yet if you don't know Aunt Matynia's—"

"Apropos, where did you come across each other?" asked the old gentleman.



“In Tarnov,” Christopher answered quickly. “Raphael was returning from Bardiov, where he was enjoying the waters with his friends, looking for—shall I tell?”

“Ah! There lies the secret!” the old gentleman laughed.

“But he didn’t find anything. German, Bohemian, Hungarian ladies—they are not for us. He was to leave Tarnov for home, but I persuaded him to come with me—instead of vegetating at home, to come with me and make the acquaintance of my eccentric friend, Master Trepka. To encourage him, I promised him that you would think up some splendid career for him,” he added boldly, seeing that his father made a wry face and shrugged his shoulders.

Raphael mumbled out some indefinite remark. He felt, even more than before, that his face was afire from the lashing by the wind which he had received on the road, as well as from the excess of new and varied sensations.

“Papa is a cunning wag . . .” Christopher whispered, bending over his father and kissing his hand.

A moment later, turning to the lackeys, he said aloud: “Beginning today, villains, you are to address your master as His Grace the Count; the young lady as Her Grace the Countess, and me—well for the time being you needn’t trouble about me. If we are to have equality, let us have it. As it is, I am a gentleman on his hide of land and therefore equal to this—His Grace the Count and Her Grace the Countess.”

The old gentleman was smilingly adjusting his cuffs, but hissing with impatience nevertheless.

“Do tell us about Vienna, Christy,” his sister begged, hanging on his arm.

Raphael watched the sparkling eyes of the young girl as she took part in the conversation, with a vague feeling of almost aversion. Her curls, her white forehead, her pink

cheeks, her pretty, thin face reminded him of the existence of women and filled his head with an unclear torment, his breast with sobs, which, amid the lively conversation, he had no time to overcome. Particularly when, with an excited whisper, she bent over her brother, when she plunged her eyes into him, he shuddered and suffered in his whole body. It seemed to him then that invisible fangs of torture were digging into his flesh.

Happily, after the supper, all repaired to the reception rooms located to the right of the entrance. In anticipation, it would seem, of Mary's coming out, they were newly refurnished after the English mode. The pieces of furniture were all of mahogany, simple, without ornament. The walls were painted in arabesques or in pictures of ruins, of pale country landscapes. Two rather smallish rooms were particularly marked by this stylish *simplicité*; the walls were faintly coloured, with a narrow border near the top, and adorned with small pictures of the Italian school. But in the deep interior of the house there still existed old, unrestored, forgotten little rooms, small drawing-rooms not intended for display, refuge places of worn, old-fashioned tapestries and brocatelles, old pieces of French pattern, on curved S-like legs, with carvings of flowers and bouquets. Small Chinese tables, chipped and marred, encrusted cabinets, and knick-knacks still dreamed there of their bygone splendour and days of triumph. Having lost their privilege of stylish and graceful existence in the salon, they seemed to wish to hide their wretchedness in the least apparent corners.

Passing a large mirror in the first salon, Raphael glanced into it and drew back at the sight of his person. Despite his change into decent, even elegant dress, he looked like a disguised bandit. His bloated face was at that moment covered with grey and scarlet blotches, his thin hair clung clammily

to a deeply lined forehead, his eyes looked with a wild, rapacious brutality. He passed quickly into the adjoining room. The old gentleman was obviously pleased that he could exhibit his fashionably appointed house to his distant and impecunious relative. The salon was indeed very spacious and beautifully furnished, but Raphael was not impressed by it. The lackeys lit the candles in the wall chandeliers, in the suspended and standing candelabra. Christopher turned to a pantaleon standing in a corner and played a favourite, seemingly an almost domestic little song:

*La nuit tombait dans la prairie,  
L'Écho dormait dans le vallon,  
Près du ruisseau chantait Amélie.*

The old gentleman seated himself in an arm-chair, half closed his eyes, and inhaled this melody with a smile of rapture, with an expression of unspeakable delight in his teary eyes. His feet, shod in low shoes and stockings, rested motionlessly on the carpet; his knit, tight-shut hands seemed to strain to his heart the distant heads of his children.

Mistress Mary, leaning on the shoulder of her brother, began to hum without words, at first timidly, then more clearly and melodiously. Her head, wrapped in a cloud of curls, was bent at first towards her brother, but it rose gradually, turned towards the father, finally to him, to the guest. Higher and higher, more solemn and beautiful, the flowing melody of the song came from the virginal breast of the maid. Then at length came the words:

*"Au matin dans les prés de Flore,  
La rose à l'instant de s'ouvrir  
Attend que la vermeille Aurore  
Sur son char amène Zéphir. . ."*

But Christopher soon jumped to another melody. His sister could not at first find it in her memory. He called out without stopping to play: "*Air: 'Dans un bois solitaire et sombre. . . .'*"

"Oh yes, I know!"

She began to sing:

*"Au près d'une féconde source  
D'où coulent cent petits ruisseaux,  
L'Amour fatigué de sa course  
Dormait sur un lit de roseaux. . . ."*

The old gentleman could not lift his eyelids or break the smile which lay on his lips. Perhaps he wished not to startle the moment of deep, melodious happiness which filled the quiet rooms of the country-house.

## 27. The Eccentric

THE young gentlemen spent only a few days in Olshyna. Christopher was impatient to start for his Stoklosy, a small manor fully five miles from Olshyna. Although he was very happy in his paternal home, still he wished to display his own little property before Raphael, as well as to free him from the rather ceremonious life of his father's house.

They finally departed. Christopher's estate lay in a wooded dale between two table-lands, in the valley of a small river falling into the Visloka. It would be difficult to imagine anything more beautiful than these woods. Every hollow was filled with reaches of oak-, beech- and birch-trees, plane-trees, and hornbeams. Every hillock was a beautiful park. Now, in the fall, the uplands and slope glowed with a galaxy of gold and russet tints. Raphael's heart beat with emotion at the sight of these places, which he viewed for the first time. It seemed to him that beams of light and clouds of radiant smoke surged and billowed from these rises and depressions. Concealed in the depths of the woods were cool green bits of meadows, bits of smooth turf the more green, the more flaming was the colour of the leaves which overhung them. The house itself stood in a wood, amid pine-trees, on the upper bank of the river. Its roof was already very mouldy, repaired numerous times with fresh shingles, and at many points seriously mis-shapen. The larchen walls slumped into the ground. Surrounding the house was an orchard, which merged imperceptibly into the forest. Beneath the windows, as beneath the windows of peasant cottages, bloomed yellow or brownish hollyhocks, tall dahlias, bright marigolds, and fiery clumps of nasturtiums. When the britzka came to a stop, there came out to greet the arrivals a withered man of medium

height, of an age which it would be difficult to describe, as it seemed to hover between the fortieth and the sixtieth year of life. His face was thin and dark. His thick hair was tied in the old-fashioned German manner, at the back of the head. A thin elongated nose protruded over lips so thin that they formed almost a line. The eyes were but two slits under black and heavy brows.

This personage was dressed rather oddly, for he wore a coat once very elegant, French in cut, with silk *revers* and waistcoat, while his feet were shod in heavy, knee-length boots, greased with tallow to protect the feet from moisture. Instead of the jabot, indispensable to a French coat, he had a woollen shawl encircling the collar of a shirt of the most Sarmatian cut.

"I fall at the feet of His Grace the Count!" he cried, descending the steps of the portico without undue haste. "His Worship has at last deigned to recall his domain, ha ha! I was already sure that His Grace—"

"The Count—" Cedro supplied.

"Would not—ha ha—come back to us."

It was an obvious thing that he was underscoring the titles and that it was at this that he was laughing so merrily. To Raphael's amazement Christopher was laughing also, though in a rather forced and painful manner.

"I in turn greet His Worth the Delegate, my benefactor and mentor. How is his valued health?" he shouted jumping from the britzka.

"Your Worship deigns to shed your grace as the sun sheds its radiant beams. I am happy to bask in the radiance of your graciousness. . . ."

"My worthy Sir Delegate, you are greying quite seriously."

"With care over his Worship's goods, ha ha. I venture to

ask in turn about his honoured health although one can see at a glance that German bread agrees with us—”

“Can it be?”

“I speak the truth. A veritable dumpling!”

“Ha ha,” Christopher laughed, standing opposite him and holding his sides.

“How happy I am!”

“Your worth will permit me to introduce to him my friend and closest comrade, a companion of my school-days, and to ask for him the hospitality of Stoklosy. He is Master Raphael Olbromski. Raffie—Master Stephen Nekanda-Trepka, *cidevant* possessor of a vast fortune, who has frittered it away on political interests, almost member of the Diet, a great peregrinator, Voltairian, encyclopædist, as well as a scoffer at all things, if I may put it that way—”

“I am very happy to know the friend of your Worship and I commend my humble services. At the same time I must deny the distinction imputed to me. I have never been in the Diet.”

“But you might have been. He was elected. But, you know, some obstinacy or other, circumstances—”

“Much too high a dignity for my meagre poor man’s intellect. *Nec sutor*— As for the obstinacy, that may be true. Our Lublin land breeds hard heads and necks. May I ask you to come in? . . .”

They entered rooms coated with whitewash, with small windows, and huge beams holding up the ceiling. Grey wooden furnishings, ancient chairs, tables, benches, and cases were kept in excellent order. Christopher Cedro threw off his coat and embraced Trepka warmly and affectionately. Both were laughing whole-heartedly, clasped in each other’s arms.

“And how long does Your Grace intend to stay in this hole?”





paternal nest, I followed the books and found hospitality together with them."

"If it were only hospitality! He started, my dear, to conduct things here like the famed grey goose. He manages the property, meddles in the affairs of the whole dominion; he brings us to account like a *fiscus*, he doles out the revenue like a miserly grandpapa. Why, I had to deluge him with sweet letters from Vienna, to send me a few coins for my expenditures. He works the mandataries so hard that not one will stay with him."

"Exaggeration!"

"In the art of exciting the peasants against the authority of the land, he has exceeded the *kreisamt* officers themselves. He builds them cottages with palatial windows, brings medicos to them when they cut each other up in the tavern; he has reduced the number of socage days *usque ad absurdum*—"

Trepka was making a smacking sound with his lips.

"If you knew how weary I am of this business in Vienna—  
Tell me, have you been taking the dogs out?"

"Aha! So that's the trouble?"

"Tell me!"

"I have."

"Lotka?"

"Lotka and Dосkoch."

"Who rode?"

"I, for one, and Gregory."

"Tell me, which did you ride?"

"Black."

"My beloved horse! He's running?"

"He is; why shouldn't he be?"

"Won't I tumble off the first day, with my eyes?"

"The horse is careful, wise— The rest depends on the rider."



"And where did you set?"

"From the Juniper Tract to Biela."

"A splendid field! We'll revel in royal fashion! Tell me, what do you think of my hounds?"

"The hounds!" The question brought a heated flush to Trepka's face, and his little eyes sparkled with pleasure. "The hounds are as light as spectres."

"That's fine, and what are you probing, studying now? Tell us the truth."

"Your Grace is returning from one of the capitals of the world and asks humble me for news? It is I who ought to be learning something new!"

"You know very well that I am not a bookworm; why expect anything of me? If you want news, I will tell you one thing: I brought you in offering a damascene rifle such as your eyes have not yet beheld in this vale of tears. Your turn now; what are you reading?"

"A rifle—" Trepka whispered, closing one eye. "That may be interesting. As for me, I change off— Now I read some short chapter of the *Mystic City* of María de Jesús de Ágreda, now for variety some little sermon of Father Luscinius. That is all."

"You Voltairian! You read Father Luscinius— If one didn't know you, he might buy you. The Devil is sure to take you one of these days, and only a pool of tar will be left of you in this old house."

"Your Grace is jesting unbecomingly."

"You old devil, I won't talk with you any more. Come, Raphael, I will show you the hiding-place of this worm."

"What now?"

"Yes, I am going to uncover you in all your nakedness."

Saying this, young Cedro opened a door and ushered Raphael into a small adjoining room. The room, apparently,

had not been whitewashed for a very long time, as brown, naked, pithy beams of larch-wood showed from under the lime. The whole inner wall was lined with huge shelves of crudest carpentering, and upon them, without method or array, lay piles of old and monstrous books. Stacks of the most miscellaneous tomes and pamphlets, of thin, flimsy newspapers, towered on a wide table in the middle of the room. Here and there on the walls hung maps, old engravings, and caricatures. In a dark corner stood a pinewood bed, fitted with poor bedding and unpretentious linen. Above hung arms, pistols, short rifles, a fowling piece, and various hunting-accessories.

"Here he sits and breeds his odious thoughts."

"Of hoof and mouth disease, of cattle plague and gid—" Trepka retorted.

An invincible disgust came over Raphael at the sight of these books, a disgust inherent in his nature for some time now. He felt stifled, as in a dream. Trepka, a sharp observer, did not allow this feeling to develop further. He turned to his guest with the careful solicitude of a healthy person who notices everything and keeps his nerves in check, and to undo the effect of the books so odious to the eye of a gentleman shifted the conversation to the fire-arms and straps hanging on the wall.

"So all these papers treat only of glanders and rowels?" Christopher continued to taunt him.

"Oh no, they touch upon staggers as well."

"And not a penny's worth of politics!"

"You could probably buy a penny's worth, but the vender himself advises you against bargaining for such poor material."

"Is that your feeling after playing with that poor material for so many years?"



“And I tell you that you are deceiving yourself frightfully. horribly. I have looked into their soul; playing the fool and simpleton, I have spied out their secrets. I have tracked their designs amid the rustle of silk in reception rooms, amid the ripple of lace at balls. Those people will not stop at anything. Do you know,” he cried, pale and terrified, “those people can bring it about that these very peasants of yours will creep into your house in the night, drag you out of your bed, and cut your head off with an ax? Their politics reach so far—”

Trepka was laughing merrily.



## 28. The Kingfisher

RAPHAEL spent several long weeks in Stoklosy in complete idleness. He was sick. Trepka, who in a varied store of information had not a small knowledge of medicine, could not guess what his trouble was. He did not, therefore, prescribe any medicine for him. He only had a camp-bed carried out and placed under the pines, and Raphael lay on it, fully dressed, looking at the sky. He himself could not guess what ailed him. He felt no pain and experienced no longing. The one thing which drew him when he woke and which was with him at the close of day was an indolent desire—not to be. . . .

The surrounding life, near as well as far, had literally no value for him. Beautiful horses, which he had once loved so, the hounds, the hunting arms, the noisy excitement of the chase, the stories of Christopher's and Trepka's adventures when they returned toward evening with the dogs, all this only tired him and pushed him more and more into himself. He forced himself to smile, to talk, to assume the tone and manner of life of strong and healthy men, but the effort exceeded his strength. Fortunately no one asked him the secret of his life. . . .

Raphael woke very much earlier than anyone else. He heard the first cock crow; without opening his eyes, the shutters closed, he knew when the sun rose. He recognized day-break by the increased sighing of the trees, by the change in the voices of nature. He heard every sound, every bark of the dogs in the village, every breath of wind. All these sounds echoed in him as in a stone. At times a sigh broke from his breast, but that was all. A stone lay on his heart. Yet, crushed and oppressed though it was, the heart did not



die. In the depths of the night's silence, when the last rustle dispersed and grew still, it would hear the sound of footsteps, strange, uncertain, timorous steps, measuring the void of time. The echo of the call of the mountains came from the darkness. The heart would then lift its stone and listen without hope of hearing, look with bloody gaze into the gloom, knowing that it would not see, and sob for hours together, but not that it might be soothed. For so hard was his lot that the longer his tears and waiting, the greater his grief and pain. Only a physical will, a bodily effort, the resisting strength of animal existence, was able to shorten the fearful melody of longing. But it was an activity as frightful as though a muscular peasant fist choked the little throat of a two-year-old child to quell its plaintive whimpering. The heart fell into its grave and lay in the calm of impotence until the coming of a fresh whiff of wind. During the course of these contests he often sought to correct his aversion to the voices of life, to the colour of growing things, to the inexpressible grace of light and shade. In vain! The living sight and happy hearing which permit one to see and hear had ceased in him. Now everything was foreign, strange. Every object, every sunbeam, every shadow, every fragrance and form, became only itself. It ceased to serve the soul. And the soul was left alone. It walked as through ruins shattered by an earthquake, as through things repelling and useless to it. Gradually everything which could be reached by sight lost its value and became a hostile entity. In order not to feel the oppressive crowding of these inimically disposed phenomena, he closed his eyes, clenched his teeth, and plunged into an artificial lethargy of silence. He was then like an extinguished flame. But while he deluded himself into a confident assurance that he could stretch this moment of strength to an hour, to a day, the distant spaces would whisper a sound, a

name pronounced lovingly. . . . A vivid breath of destruction rose in the emptiness of night, and laid waste all that his industrious will had succeeded in rearing with feverish haste and toil.

One morning, at the very end of September, his spirit at the end of its resources, and his body refusing to lie in bed any longer, he rose at day-break and went out of the house. It was a cool morning. A southern wind had roused the whirring pines and swished about, wrapping the body in cold, clinging waves. Raphael, scarce knowing why, went to the edge of the river which ran in a trough below the level of the sandy table-land, some hundred steps from the house. He had never been there as yet. A wide, shallow sheet of water rolled its flickering, soundless ripples between the long streaks of land which divided its bed here and there. The entire horizon was veiled by a dense thicket of alderwood, almost grown into trees. The river spun on in their shade as though hidden from the world.

The sun fell upon the river in sharp darts and javelins, shooting through the dense shrubbery. The vivid water flushed a fiery hue. The shadows became all the deeper where the sun did not reach. The alders stood over the black curve of the bank like an impregnable wall. The odour of blackening leaves penetrated the air. It seemed to Raphael that this strange fragrance came from the dew which lay in a hoary film on the ground and the leaves.

The memory of something very old, Vyganka, Vyrvy or Tarniny, or rather not a memory, but a freshly relived moment of the happy days of childhood, now lost for ever, embraced his neck like a pair of sisterly arms. He yielded to this feeling for a little while. The numbness of heart gave way and the eyes filled with tears of relief. With the delight which he always felt at the sight of new places, with that in-

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satiab!e joy which approaches the verge of pain, he fixed his tear-dimmed eyes upon the curves of the river, upon the wild clumps of alder. He drew the moist fragrance into his lungs and listened for the first time in many, many months to the soft murmur of autumn leaves. From afar, from the fields, whiffed a light, cool wind.

Raphael stopped as though thunder-struck, and for the first time in so many days he laughed from the depths of his being, from the bottom of his soul, smiled at a thought new to him, unknown, like a strange world.

He began to ponder on the thought of how good it is to live. . . . Slowly he began to consider, from an inner impulse of his own, how beautiful and ineffable is the world, how great and blessed a miracle is life, in what strange ways the hour of suffering becomes a hundredfold wealth of happiness, flowing from the sight of earth. . . .

Just then a kingfisher, winging swiftly over the water, across the humming forest of birch- and alder-trees, of pines and willows, flew by with a sharp, noisy, ringing song. The eye could scarcely catch his flight, so quickly did he pierce the air. It seemed only as though a sapphire, an azure-blue thread, a rainbow-coloured cry of happiness, had girt and bound this green bouquet. The cry pierced the soul of the listener, entered it to the inmost core. Silence had again returned, but the voice still trembled within him and remained forever in his soul.

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29. One Morning

SHARP and swift, like the stroke of a whip-lash, a year passed since Raphael had come to Stoklosy. He spent the autumn in hunting, as a guest; he danced through the winter; and in the spring, accepted as a co-manager, he began to work in the company of Trepka and to some extent of Christopher. Health and dashing humour did not fail him at this time. In the winter particularly he felt as if in heaven. A week did not pass without a ball somewhere in the vicinity, a ball worthy of the name, lasting till early morning. Raphael was in great demand as a good dancer, a polished cavalier, a smooth Varsovian. So much so that now and again he went a-courting with an eye to a large dowry. He picked, deliberated, and in the mean while enjoyed himself as never before.

Trepka came to like him very much. In the spring and summer and towards autumn he gradually began to leave the management of Stoklosy to him. Free of that care, he buried himself deeper and deeper in his books. Hunting, attending sick peasants and cattle, peregrinations from cottage to cottage, these were his recreation. Young Cedro spent the winter in Lvov with his father and sister, where Mistress Mary was making her debut. Trepka jeered not a little at this carnivalling, but as a matter of fact he was glad that his young friend was not in Vienna. In the mean while, in the fall of the year 1805, Christopher, obedient to his father's will, repaired again to the Danubian capital. Trepka and Olbromski spent the days of that autumn on horseback, with hounds, the evenings in playing chess or in reading.

Trepka came to exert a great influence on his companion. His conversation, his smiles, his jeers and gibes held a pe-

culiar sting. In order not to suffer its pricks Raphael began to explore the thoughts of the old eccentric, and the deeper he went into them, the greater was the satisfaction he found. Trepka was a very pleasant man, enduringly interesting. One could talk with him about everything, from the most difficult, scarce comprehensible things to the most trivial, to the most broadly indecent. He was a master of all trades. He was able to throw such a light upon the things and affairs of this world that they seemed wholly different and he had such an ample store of wit that it was quite inexhaustible, even on constant association.

After much rainy weather, toward the end of October, came a series of clearer and warmer days. Autumn fog already lay in the fields and on the wilted, leaf-strewn woods. The roads were so sodden that only on horse, and that on a nimble one, could one make one's way through the marshes. The two men, in long boots, bespattered to their very caps, rode one early morning intending to slip the dogs if it should prove that the fields of the plateau had dried somewhat. They planned to reach the highway stretching in the direction of Tarnov and then through the beech woods, over a small trail, to cut their way to the fields. The unfrequented, clayey wood-path was harder than the road, but as slippery as ice.

Trepka rode ahead, humming to himself and to no one else an old song, his favourite and only *romanza*:

My eyes met yours, but not for long,
For ere I knew that I was seen,
Your gaze, indifferent to my prayer,
Turned coldly to the lifeless wall
And plunged my soul into a void
Of aching, unconsoled despair.

The sad sylvan silence, the stillness of flat-lands covered

with autumnal mists, the sullen day, seemed, in a way, to demand that song. Raphael listened to it willingly. . . . If Trepka had stopped singing it to himself, he would have started to hum it. . . .

The forest path brought them to a plain and they now turned toward the highway. The hounds, running free, jumped like a lightning-flash and ran swiftly down the road. They followed them into the misty haze. Suddenly they came to a dead stop and stood as if thunder-struck. Out of the mist, over the whole visible length of the highway, poured a serried human mass, gleaming with a thousand colours.

"Some army or other . . ." Trepka whispered, pulling his horse to its haunches.

After a moment of attentive scrutiny he added: "But they are not Austrians!"

His nostrils were trembling nervously, and his half-shut eyes gleamed savagely from their narrow slits. He walked his horse. The two riders proceeded slowly to the highway. The hounds, taut and tense, ran headlong in that direction. Soon, however, they stopped and stood as if their legs were rooted to the ground. With cocked ears and extended necks they winded motionlessly.

Abandoning the marshy highway, companies of grenadiers, with heavy carbines on their shoulders and knapsacks on their backs, trudged over the fields in scattered, irregular columns. Huge, straight, two-coloured plumes on their pail-shaped casquettes waved like a forest of trees. White-gaitered legs sank rhythmically in the pasty clay. Behind the grenadiers came regiments of jagers, in caps of similar shape, but without the plumes, burdened with huge knapsacks, cartridge-boxes, canteens, and broadswords. Their bayonets swayed like the mobile surface of a lake, which, fading in clouds and mists, rolls its steely billows in mute and stony silence.

Here and there the waves of the lake described a half-circle, whirled vortexlike in place, billowed about some central point. Nekanda guessed that these were places where their artillery guns had sunk in the mud. He was right, for when their eyes grew accustomed to the scene, they saw a whole series of guns grounded in the clayey soil. Dark-clad artillerymen hovered busily about them, smirching their cloth gaiters up to the knees. The wide white belts running diagonally across their chests were daubed with mud and their great caps touched the ground as they bent down to adjust the jackscrews in an effort to lift the sunken wheels and cradles, the tails and powder-boxes, from their muddy grave. Far from the infantry and artillery, to the side, came files of cavalry. Dragoons with pointed crests, uhlans in four-cornered caps, resplendent with gleaming ornaments, finally regiments of white cuirassiers on horses of monstrous size. Their great shakos gleamed with hairy combs. One would have believed that these were the iron legions of Rome coming in endless billows from the impenetrable mists of night.

30. In the Army, Far Away

THE day was dying over the faded fields. Here and there gleamed the fresh-sown winter wheat, but on the whole the vast fields yawned with the emptiness of autumn fallows. The pastures, the river-bank, were still green with the vivid sheen of grass; but the flatter meadows were already sere and yellow with the last, coarse crop of after-growth. A faint greyish mist hung in the trees surrounding the old house at Stoklosy. Uncounted swarms of sparrows clung to the naked branches of the lindens and strained their throats in an unceasing monotonous warble. A flock of crows, cawing and flapping their wings, jostled in neighbourly fashion and fought for their perches in the sere branches of the Italian poplar. The dampness of graveyards was slowly invading the piles of swept-up leaves. From afar, from the south, blew a wind, soft and warm.

The three friends, Trepka, Cedro, and Olbromski, were sitting on the porch of their house silently enjoying the last warm day of late November. They were engrossed, each in his own thoughts, thoughts which besieged their heads in an importunate throng. The open fields drew their eyes into the far horizon. The sandy path of the linden archway leading to the house, sodden by the recent rains, but now dry and firm, sank slowly in the heavy, wistful shadow of the orphaned tree-trunks.

"Do you observe, my friends, how fondly Favonius bids us farewell?" said Trepka.

"Verily kisses us . . ." Cedro whispered.

"Kisses are always first in your Worship's countly imagination."

"I'm not yet a doddering mushroom, that is why."

“Not so with Raffie! He is thinking, I’d give my head, of supper.”

“I am, for fact. The stomach fares poorly on thought and meditation.”

“A pleasant breeze! I tell you, on my word, that you will not find a day like this with such a wind in any of your Florences, no matter how long you may wait.”

Just then the dogs, dozing on the sand in front of the porch, opened their eyes and cocked their ears. One gave a short bark, another jumped to his feet; then, as if at command, all rushed down the alley. The heads of the three friends turned heavily in that direction. The dogs suddenly grew quiet and backed into the yard, whining timorously, their tails curled in. A beggar, leaning on a wooden crutch, his clothing in rags, emerged from the half-shade of the alley and came slowly into the light. Limping heavily, he neared the open gate. There he stopped. The sun was dying and its last ray flashed in a horizontal stream over the land.

Trepka covered his eyes with his hand from the red glare which fell straight into his eyes and said: “A beggar.”

Young Cedro took a *zwanziger* from his pocket and, giving it to the kitchen boy, pointed to the beggar.

“Give him a bowl of porridge in the kitchen. . . .” Trepka added. “Let the old fellow eat a bit and start on again before night, for the dogs here are vicious and opposed to beggars.”

The scullery boy ran to the gate and stood there a few minutes talking with the old man in what seemed a rather heated fashion. All were surprised when he returned holding the coin in the palm of his hand. Still at a distance he cried out laughingly: “The old man, your Worship, refuses to take the money. He asked me if your Worships are not Ger-

mans by chance. He doesn't dare, he says, come up on the premises."

"What a haughty old thing!"

"Doesn't take money and inquires into the qualifications of the landowners."

"He says that he would like to ask a night's lodging."

"What more!"

Young Cedro, with his characteristic impetuosity, jumped up and went to the gate. To break the monotony of things Trepka started after him. Raphael followed his friends indifferently. When they reached the gate, they saw a simple middle-aged man in ragged clothing, with two bags slung crosswise at his sides. He was smooth-shaven and as tanned as a harvester who did not taste of shade throughout the whole summer. Tawny hair, faded by rains and the fire of the sun, peered from beneath an abject cap of most peculiar shape. His coat and the boot of his sound leg were completely covered with dust. Grey eyes looked at them, unflinching to the point of boldness and as clear as air. He did not bow in the manner of beggars, he did not whine or groan. Standing erect, he waited. His clear eyes passed from one face to another, searching, probing. Finally they stopped for a longer while on the visage of the eldest.

"Why this catechism, daddy?" Trepka grumbled out.

"I wanted to ask," the beggar said with the songlike accent of Lithuania, "whether one of you has not served in the military?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"A military man would receive a comrade under his roof, an outsider would not. I am seeking a night's lodging. I am very weary, walking thus tumble-stumble over the road. Very weary."

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"And where are you coming from, that you are so tired?"

"From very far, from very far I come, my friends."

The three became silent and, swept by a peculiar, almost painful, feeling, looked into those clear and stern, candid eyes.

"Well," said Trepka after a little while, quietly and friendly, "if it's a question of a lodging for the night you may have it in this house, brother countryman."

"May the Lord repay you, my dear ones, that you do not chase a wandering beggar from your door. But if you will, have your servants withdraw, so that they will not tell it about that I am receiving this favour at your hands. It might prove very bad for you—and for me—"

"Do not fear! Not a hair will fall from your head under the roof of this house," said Cedro in a lowered voice.

They entered the yard. The sun was hiding behind the hillocks, and the great trees, the dark pines and tall lindens, threw shadows so thick and dark that they seemed to be part of the night. They ordered that supper be served to the old man. The gentlemen ate theirs hastily. Trepka bade the servants go to bed. The friends themselves closed the shutters. The wanderer seated himself in a corner of Nekanda's room and took off his bags. From beneath the heavy cloak peered the remains of a uniform.

"Where are you coming from now, from where are you returning?" all three asked him, standing about him in a circle.

"I am returning home, to my diggings, from a place called Austerlitz, where we won an unheard-of battle, and I lost this leg of mine."

"But that battle took place in December of last year!"



is left. I have forgotten what is home, what is brother or sister. I go, but heavy are the thoughts I carry before me, my brothers."

"Our dear brother," Christopher said to him with trembling lips, "wherever you go, whosoever house you enter, there you will find a fraternal hearth open to you."

"May the Lord repay your kindly word. . . ."

"Tell us about your life, what you have gone through and seen," Trepka insisted, "for we here on our farm have barely heard this and that, by rumour, hearsay."

"Very well, I will tell you everything from beginning to end. Only let me collect my thoughts. Ha, listen, then—I was quite accustomed to war, yet when that day comes back to my mind, my heart flames anew! It is so today. What, then, at that time! Young blood was in one's veins and boiling pride in one's heart. There were plenty of us in the ranks who spoke thus: return home, plough your half-acre, sow buckwheat peacefully, and quarrel with your neighbour over a sheaf of hay? To what end and purpose? May we not live to see the day! When I recall it all now, my brothers, when I think— Counsel and counsel we held, in every nook and corner; night and day we wrangled and talked, good kindly talk amongst ourselves.

"A strange, strange thing," the soldier laughed, shaking his head. "Only consider, my brothers. Amongst ourselves, it seemed, we talked, within our own walls. Until one night the soldiers came to each and every noble house in the vicinity and made the levy. Whoever only had talked a bit louder was taken into the army. They divided us into parties, then dressed us in gaiters, and away, march, march, into Austrian territories. I, I was not the poorest of the talkers, and so I travelled all the way to the regiment of the Graf



von Königsegg-Rothenfels. I marched with the third battalion. We didn't stop to rest until we reached Pilsen, in Bohemia. They put on me a white half-frock of a uniform, white pantaloons, white gaiters. If it were not for the shallow black boots, the flat black hat, if it were not for the cuffs, the collar, and the lining red as a raspberry, one would have been a veritable angel.

"A carbine, a cartridge-box, a white belt across the chest, and one was ready for drill call. Ha, the dastards! How many penalties before a man learned what some corporal mumbled, what some cocky little officer muttered under his nose! A year did not pass and we went into upper Austria into the Tyrolese Mountains to fight the Frenchman and battle for the Pope. But not the Holy Father alone. One's head swam when they began to read before the ranks in a broken Polish-Hungarian who it was that relied on that valour of ours. We had to learn that like our prayers. No small piece of land did I and my companions cross, fighting for these personages. When I recall and figure it now, my friends, we must have covered three hundred leagues in an unbroken stretch. We went on foot through German countries, green wooded plots and farms, through very beautiful cities along those humming river-streams—Lord, my Lord. The men were thrown together from all sides, from the four corners of the globe. One looked at another like a wolf; one watched one's officer like a bandit; he in turn snarled at his subordinates. Besides, the commander saw to it that no kin or countrymen were put in the same ranks, in one company, oh no! Let only the corporal see that two are whispering together in the night, let him see that they are sidling towards each other in battle, as if by accident, that they talk to each other with their eyes from a distance, or by signs! The first time they will both run through a double row of clubs, the



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next time a bullet in the head, so that you learned how to keep your tongue inside your teeth and your eyes under your lids.

“And yet one would recognize one’s own in unthinkable places, in the tenth regiment, by his eyes, by the bones of his face, by his sadness and silence. How many times, my brothers, running like mad over the battlefield, you trampled a whole field of wounded with hard and ruthless step and jammed your heel into a fraternal breast or head! A familiar cry, a groan in your native tongue, would strike you from the ground and pierce you like a bayonet. And how many such fields did I cross in the first war! How many in the second! In the second war we descended from the mountains into the Lombard fields. There the olive-tree greets you like your native willow, there the peach-orchard blooms. . . . It was spring. Some of our comrades under Archduke Charles went down along the Rhine against Jourdan, others tore on into Switzerland against Masséna, while we under Feldzeugmeister Baron von Kray, went down to the river Adige. On the 26th of March, bright and early in the morning, the French divisions fell upon us. Young ruffians, soldiers just out of their diapers, so they were eager for battle, and jumped at your throat, as in school. The division Grenier! But the Emperor’s men, too, were not harmless or helpless lambs. An old soldier, well drilled, trained in a hundred battles. Things began to seethe! The two armies clashed, twisted, turned, ate their way into each other. Carnage and battle! Bayonet strikes bayonet, eye meets eye. But the old fighter from under Melas or Kray will not surrender his bayonet to the first young blade that comes, even if the ruffian owns a young set of teeth. But they had others helping them. In the vanguard marched a battalion different from the rest. It came down the centre truly like a living wall.

Man to man, shoulder to shoulder, a shield of bayonets before them. . . .

“My dear brothers! I look at these men with bloody eye, tired and worn with battle. . . . Madness takes hold of my head, the gun falls from my hands, my hair stands up on end! There are our colours and our ensign! I listen, and, by the living God, I hear our command. I see them thus, eye to eye, for the first time. Before you could say a word, I am sobbing in the ranks like a child. Before you could say a word, I am pulling a uniform from one of those kindred dead and putting it on me. All around me are my own people. I hear the command. Then think I to myself: ‘Since, dear Jesus, You have allowed me to live to see this day and have shed the radiance of Your mercy on my lot, then I will show You that I am no ragtag and bobtail.’ With that same Austrian *Gewehr* you should have seen me set off! I fall in line, and arm to arm with my brethren I lunge into the battalion Königsegg-Rothenfels! Kill—then let us kill! After a four-hour battle, fighting tooth and nail, the Delmas and Grenier divisions took the breastworks with a full assortment of ordnance, pushed out my Austrians, chased them to the left bank, took both bridges by storm, and did not allow them to be destroyed. Fighting in the Victor division was the second Polish battalion, which astounded the French themselves with its bravery. We chased the white ruffians to the very walls of Verona. But the battle that day cost the Polish legion seven hundred and fifty men. This was the fashion in which I joined the legions. They enlisted me in the third, which was only a remnant, a tiny shred. General Schérer began to retreat. He ordered two hundred of us, all new recruits, to close ourselves in the fortress of Milan, which could hold out only a few days, while the rest proceeded to Mantua. We knew that any day the Austrians

would surround us like the sea and that they would wring our necks as soon as we surrendered. Fortunately for us, the disgraced Schérer gave up his command. General Moreau retracted the inhuman command at once. He took us with him when he was fleeing to the other side of Ticino. The legion of Vielhorski was shut up in Mantua and our communication with it broken. We went with the Italian army. We were in the battle of Valence. Our old courage revived, former times came to mind. Soon General Macdonald, fleeing from Naples through the great mountains of Italy, came, unhappily for him, to Trebio and waged that fearful battle. He united later with the Italian army and went under the command of General Joubert. The battle of Terzo and Medesima! The valiant Joubert fell, a true soldier, when early in the morning, at three o'clock, he waded out in the foremost file. . . .

"We fought that day from day-break until late at night, thirty thousand of us against eighty of the united army. General Colli, with one battalion of French ruffians and two hundred of us who formed the third legion, covered the retreat. After Joubert, Championnet was made general; when he died—Masséna. The first legion, under Dombrowski, reduced by half, came into the Genoese hills. There we met. Hopes rose, the ranks shook with news that the "highest Bartek," as our soldiers called the chief commander, had returned from his expedition into Egypt.

"The sword grew to one's hand at the spark of hope that any day, any moment, he would come to take command of us and lead us through a crushed and overthrown Vienna. We saw a mirage of Carpathian Mountains, of the marketplace in Cracow. . . . We crossed distant lands in song. . . . In the course of those busy, doughty days, we entered the city of Genoa, and its gates closed behind us. There General Ott came down upon us, pouring from the shore, from

all the mountains and valleys, while the English ships of Lord Keith came upon us from the sea. Our food-supply was cut off. From that moment not one seed of grain came into the city. At first they put us on half-rations, then quarter, finally two ounces of stinking meat to a man and a crumb of bread. Great famine ensued. Not only in the army, but in the whole city of Genoa. People began to die like flies and were taken to that lovely Campo Santo in veritable hordes.

"In a few weeks twenty thousand people died of rotten food and contagious disease. Of us, soldiers inured to poverty and the hardship of life, there remained eight thousand skeletons. We sat upon those crested hills, over the city, watching like vultures. Our Pole, you know, worries but little. As for sighing, he will sigh when the moment is bad and he will swear enough to make your bones crack, but he will soon come to with anything at all. And soon you will hear him singing away— If only together, if only in a body, all will be well. Leave him alone for two days, and he will groan and sigh so mightily that the strongest of him will go bad. We saw the Austrian host stretched out along the valleys and away on the dry, bald hills, a-sharpening their bayonets for our carcasses. Famine came upon us in the last days of the defence. The steep, headlong streets of Genoa! Those dark and narrow caverns which the sun never lights! They were empty as you walked down to the harbours to fish for some pieces of jetsam with a hook which you made from a pin, empty, as though all to a man were asleep.

At length our chiefs, Masséna and Soult, capitulated. What was left of the legions walked out of the city and set off in the direction of Marseilles. With not a penny in our pockets, without boots and clothing, in shreds of torn and mouldy rags, half naked and hungry, we went on through the French mountains. Winter, rain, hunger were our com-

panions. You were barefoot, and when you stumbled and cut and bruised your legs, until they swelled like loaves of bread, you took a small board and fastened it to your foot with string, for a sole, and kept on marching. The rags fell off your bones. We walked, it would happen, through Italian settlements in the Maritime Alps; beautiful girls laughed at us, standing in front of their houses, and pointed their fingers at our attire. Only our knapsacks were whole, and our caps. The rest was all holes. What shame we felt!

"In Marseilles the same hungering and misery awaited us. The Directory refused to hear anything about us. For their own last penny the officers bought blankets for the soldiers, dressed the new-comers in uniforms, and put them under their old standards.

"There came the officers who were taken prisoner in '97 in Mantua, the ones who endured eleven months in an empty monastery near Leoben. Gaining their freedom, they came at once. After them came the soldiers who had escaped during the capitulation and, having crossed Mont Cenis, wandered about France. After that not a day would pass but there would come one or two comrades who had been taken prisoner and sent in chains into various Austrian regiments and who, upon escaping from the Emperor's ranks, sought their own command in the legions for hundred of miles. Not soon, not soon, our leaders read us the decree of the First Consul that we were to be treated as mercenaries of the French Republic. We divided into two legions. The first, composed of seven battalions of infantry and one of artillery, came under the command of our lieutenant-general and was annexed to the Italian armies; the second, made up of four foot-battalions, a regiment of cavalry, and two companies of horse artillery, went with the army of the Rhine. Soon our first legion counted six thousand men. We left Marseilles for Mantuan

territory, where old Masséna was to assume command of us.

“The year ’99! The imperial armies pushed back at Mincio. Part of our legion went into the district of Peschiera. I, in the other, to Mantua. A strange act of fate! For only consider, my friends: we were in the moats, the putrid ditches and walled-in fosses which the blood of our brothers had drenched two years before. Here was our opportunity to more than repay the base treachery of the year ’97, the secret paragraph of Kray. The cry spread like wildfire through the ranks: ‘Do not forgive!’

“When we had stretched our line for a quarter of a mile, and the white soldiery was about to file out, the legionaries clenched their teeth as one man and fixed their bloody eyes upon the gate. Here, on this very spot, stood the men who had suffered that infamous disgrace! Another moment and we would pounce like hawks on the sick and powerless garrison. Arms at rest, but death breathes from every eye.— But just then, as if at command, our officers turn to us and make a short address. ‘A disgrace ’twould be,’ they say, ‘and a blot on the unsullied honour of our knighthood to wreak a foul and abject vengeance. The Pole fights not with perjury, with oppression of the weak, with carnage and perfidious homicide. A soldier’s honour bids him show his enemy the same unchanging, iron stability in the hour of triumph as in the hour of vanquishment.’

“The legionary did not oppose his commander. We stood in proper order when the enemy began to leave the fortress by way of the citadel. Our general demanded only that the Austrian army change its parade step to quick time. And so it happened. And as they marched thus without standards, swiftly, swiftly, again and again a Polish soldier would step from their ranks, break his arms before the eyes of his commanders, and take his place in our columns.


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"That was our last beautiful moment. The peace of Lunéville! Our souls darkened with grief. We saw that the flower of our hope had reached its full bloom and was now faded and falling. Falling—from the gates of Vienna. . . . The second legion received orders to go from the Rhine into the Province of Tuscany, which took the title of the Kingdom of Etruria. General Kniazievich flung down his insignia, and so did all the more spirited of his officers. Sokolnicki led the legion in three lines through Switzerland to the place of its destination. Six and a half thousand of us took possession of Reggio and Modena.

"No one now had any idea of what was going to happen next. It was rumoured that we were to go into the service of the King of Etruria, then as Cisalpine mercenaries. People got frightened. Desertion crept in, disorder ensued. The better informed spread some sort of gossip that they would do the same thing with us that some Fritz the Great did with his mercenaries, after the Seven Years' War, but as no one knew very well what Fritz it was and what he did with those armies, the fright waxed greater and greater. And then arose our plan of defence.

"One of our strong battalions formed part of the garrison in Mantua, its most powerful part. The plan of defence was that we were to take possession of Pradelli Gate, where so much Polish blood had been spilled into the fosses, and through that point let in the second division of Sokolnicki's army. At the same time a regiment of cavalry was to seize Peschiera, the lines about Mincio, including all the strong and impregnable places. The garrison was then to march against the patrol and then declare war or negotiate with the French Republic. It was Fiszzer's idea. The officers were called into consultation, several from each battalion. All cried out unanimously that they agreed and stated with the most fiery en-



thusiasm that they were ready to act upon the plan. But our general was opposed to it. He gave a different suggestion. 'Let us leave Modena,' says he, 'and go quickly to Otranto, there seize the ships and embark upon them, and sail under arms to Corfu, Cephalonia, and the other islands which form the Republic of the Seven Islands in the Ionian Sea.' There, according to his plan, we would seize the stronger points, proclaim the independence of the islands, settle there as their army, and bide our time. General Dombrovski set out to lay this plan before the First Consul.

While this planning was going on in our ranks, General Viglione came from headquarters to Modena to reorganize us. He brought us the word of the First Consul that since we could not continue as legions, and since we recoiled at going into the service of the King of Etruria lest the world take us for hirelings, then he proposed that we assume French allegiance. 'Whoever of you,' he said, 'sets foot on French soil, will receive all the rights of a French citizen.' We gave credence to that. They forthwith took away our title of Polish legions and changed us into half-brigades of the foreign army. They reduced our eleven battalions of foot to nine; that is, changed them into three half-brigades. As a reward for their services, almost a hundred officers lost their places. Two regiments were detailed for Cisalpine service, the third was to remain in Etruria. The staff of the legions was removed from command. The first half-brigade was ordered to march at once to Milan. . . . Thus were our corps torn apart. The efforts of our general brought no result whatever. The project of embarking for the seven islands and of occupying Morea did not meet with the approval of the crafty minister. Sadly our leader came back to announce the downfall of the legions. The organization accomplished, the pay of the third half-brigade was stopped for several months,

and when, because of the resulting indigence, our officers were unable to make a step in any direction, the fifth and sixty-eighth half-brigades came out and stood under arms, with orders to use violence in case of our resistance. We were then surrounded by a vastly outnumbering force and compelled, under the jaws of cannon, to board a line of frigates in Livorno—”

“For where?” Cedro asked, under his breath.

“Where? At first they told us that we were going to Toulon; then they admitted it outright.”

“To the Antilles?” Trepka muttered.

“Yes, my brothers.”

“You, who pride yourselves on your honour, soldiers with arms in hand!”

“With arms in hand—”

“You should have died and not gone under constraint.”

“It is easier to say the word than to do the thing. Hope did not leave us even then. We said to ourselves: ‘One thousand of us perished, two thousand perished, the third will perish, but some way or other we will hold out. The tenth thousand, and if not the tenth, then the twentieth will come to its own. The great leader had given his word. The soldier weighs his leader’s word in a sensitive scale. We said then that apparently the hour had not struck for that last thousand. And our officers! My friends, listen attentively and with a willing heart—

“The officers of our half-brigade, although they knew what awaited them, did not wish to gain their freedom by stealth, they did not wish to abandon the soldier in that very bad hour, the soldier whom they had led in battle, with whom they had crossed mountains, plains. Not one fled from Livorno, to save his head, though there were many opportunities.

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“They had given their Polish word of honour that they would share the lot of their brothers the soldiers. True, there was one later, I heard, who, while further battalions of our men were on their way to Genoa, following our tracks to embark upon the seas, placed squadrons of French cavalry to their side and rear, lest anyone take to flight. It was through him also that our officers were suspected of revolt, which hastened the order to embark. That one himself stayed ashore when the war frigates pulled off from the Genoese shore. That was the first and last breach of faith in the legions.”

“But tell us what happened to you,” Cedro insisted.

“I belonged to the 113th half-brigade, which went on deck the 13th of June 1802 in Livorno. The precaution of General Rivaud, who surrounded us in a ring with infantry, cavalry, and artillery and pushed us to the port, was entirely superfluous. We stood in orderly ranks on the stone pavement of the port. The *chaloupes* waited for us in a row. Despair was sundering our chests like the storm. For a mighty storm rose that day on the sea. I recall it well. . . . Those cold walls, those solitary stone banks in the sea, to the south, beyond the quiet bay, white foam splashing upon them from black pits and hollows. The heaven dark in the day as at midnight, and in it, close, close, it seemed, the sombre, threatening Capri. The lighthouse torch flashes upon it, one and two, one and two, like a painful signal of fear. In the iron sky the mews flit about puling and screeching. They fall like a flash into the grey, moving mountains, into the vicious hollows, into those cutting and burning smoke-whirls, then once more up, up, on the wing, until they vanish. At your feet, man, the sea whimpers and sobs between the rolling breakers. What voices are in it! What cries!

“A watchman’s house stands at the very end of the mole.

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Crouching and hunched it seems to sit and wait. It turns its back, pulls the mosses of its stony roof over its eyes, and suffers. An unleashed billow strikes it from the right, a water hill comes charging on it from afar, from Elba or Corsica, like a wild, frenzied horse. . . . The wind is quiet in the port. It only tugs at our corvettes. It fills the lower sails, stretches them until the lines groan and hiss. The upper sails are furled. Only the great sail, which sailors call the *grande voile de misaine*, stretches at times as though it wished to try its giant strength.

"They gave the order: 'To the *chaloupes*!'"

"They tell us to weigh anchor on the vice-admiral frigate. It had cut into the bottom and hooked against the rocks. A hundred and some odd score of us set to. At length it gave. The ship veers and manœuvres, adjusts her sails. . . . Soon she leaves the stony dikes and heads for the open sea. Our corvette makes after her trace in trace. Heigh-ho! No sooner were we out on the main, on the wind-swept strand, than the storm takes hold of us and carries us on. Into the neck between Elba and Corsica! For a short time we can glimpse the stony, empty, dark-red shore. We hear the frenzied water-bells ring against the cliffs, the forests hum over the mountains, the red bluffs hoot and bellow. Soon one mast is broken like a twig of hazel and thrown into the water, together with the sail. Lanterns come crashing and falling to the deck from the upper masts. A storm! Our ship goes up and down. A field of sea walls lashes her from side to side, strikes her wooden hull as with a battering-ram. A dreadful, steel-grey sea! Ravening and mad!

"Many hard things have I seen in my life, but never anything like that. Fear swept me through and through. Death, sudden and imminent, looked one in the eye, breathed into one's face. . . . The storm scattered our flotilla, com-

posed of thirteen ships, to the four corners of the globe. Only two succeeded in getting back to port. Three were driven into the Piombino Canal between the island of Elba and the dry shore, a Greek ship was shattered completely on the rocks, and of a hundred and sixty people only Captain Castus and his wife reached the mainland. The rest of the ships, ours amongst them, tossed over the seas, swept by the frenzy of the elements. We had no food or drink during that time. Whoever lay unconscious and rolled from one end of the hold to the other, him the captain could not set to work, but whoever could stand on his feet was thrown on deck and put at the cables. More than one of us was struck by a flying billow and swallowed by the foam for all eternity. Barefoot, drenched to the last stitch, belaboured and torn by nausea, without life or strength one pulled and hauled at those ropes. Then once, on a dark night, the ship struck against a rock. She creaked, trembled, and flopped to the side, then stopped.

"We heard the shout of the captain: 'The axes! Cut the ropes! Cut the second mast! The cannon from the sunken end into the sea!' At it then, with all the strength in your arms! Our cannons went splash! All six, as one, and the ship slowly rose, righted herself. After four days and four nights the elements began to calm. Then my companions and I went to sleep. Cold fever shook us, frightful dreams filled the endless hours. . . . Thirst. . . . You did not know where you were, or what was happening to you. In the mean while the shattered ships found themselves between the Balearic Islands and the coast of Spain. Our ship stayed there until her sails were mended. After a fortnight or so she got herself together and set off for Malaga. The other members of the flotilla had already arrived there. A ship caught up with us, the ship which carried the elder Bolesta, chief of the battalion, and which was driven to the Gulf of Sidra in

northern Africa. Our ship weighed anchor in July and, steering steadily along the coast, between the shores of Gibraltar and Algeciras and Ceuta in Africa, went slowly in the appointed direction. We saw the Old World from the deck with naked eye. The weather was quiet and beautiful. The sea barely wrinkled, barely made a playful ripple. In my mind's eye I still see to this day the two distant shores. The coast of Spain, with its wall of rocky cliffs, which shoot into the sky, naked and gaunt save for a lonely pine or cypress. Feathery crests of palm-leaves rise from the sands stretched smoothly on the shore of Africa. They seem, from afar, like splashes of osier on our Polish riversides. The ships sailed past, one after the other. Our men uncovered their heads. They stood silent and their eyes took sad leave of the land which had given them birth. A feeling of dreadful sorrow and regret came over us. . . .

"The next day we came to Cádiz. The half-brigade which was to change ships disembarked at Cádiz and spent twelve days in preparation for its departure. We did not set sail until August when, with a favourable north-east wind, we skirted the headland of Tangier. We passed Madeira and the Canaries and kept on. The wind changed, we entered the waters of the circling ocean. From this point a steady east wind, with a clear sky, allowed us to steer over the curly billows, straight for the Antilles.

"About the first of September an east wind woke and pushed us speedily toward the island. However, we did not spy the island of Samana until the middle of October. Soon we sailed into the bay of Manzanillo and cast anchor below the city of Cap Français. At this point begins our history. Even then already the leader of the insurgent negroes, Toussaint L'Ouverture, had been caught treacherously and sent to France, where he finished his sturdy life in some dismal



castle. In August 1802 there passed over the quiet island a whispered rumour about the introduction of slavery amongst the negroes. This design on the part of the French Government aroused universal terror and became a call to rebellion. In the mountains of San Domingo a negro, L'Amour de Rans, placed himself at the head of the creole negroes, in Villière Sans-Souci called forth an insurrection, in Dondon Noel, in Plaisance Sylla, in the vicinity of Port du Pays Makaya. But the actual leader of all was Charles Belair, with headquarters in the Kaho Mountains. Almost the whole negro population of the island joined with the mulattos and shouldered arms. Captain-General Leclerc, goaded by the negro leaders who were still with the French, such as Dessalines, the same one who, they say, later declared himself emperor of the island of Haiti, decided to terrorize the enemy by general and unsparing slaughter. They tortured the prisoners of war. It became a rule that every prisoner of war was to die in torture. A negro caught with arms, or even without arms, but in the field, no matter whether guilty or innocent, was put to death. The other side did the same. For us this was a new manner of conducting war.

"Dreadful sicknesses littered the fields with sick and dead, the frightful yellow fever in particular. A strange disease this was. Some it killed on the spot, like a thunderbolt, without previous symptoms of any kind; for others it was a long, merciless dying.

"One day a passenger ship turned from the ocean into the harbour of Cap Français. I was sitting on the shore, killed in body and spirit. This was after a year of our fighting in the island. I had been wounded in the leg and was curing it by covering the wound with finely ground gunpowder and sousing it with the strongest wine I could get, or, for a change, with sea-water. The negro ball tore not





a little of my flesh, bruised and splintered the bone. The old stump swelled like a ram, so the commanders allowed me to sit and lie about on the shore. And so we sat there, ten or twelve of us, all wounded, talking about our island. We had enough of it, up to the neck and more. No sooner did one tell a story than another told a better, as if the Devil himself were inventing them. Each one felt as though his soul had left him, and perhaps it had. . . . It was all the same to every one—whether he lived or died. To spare someone's life or to shorten it for him was but the question of one short moment. No forethought before it, not a shred of regret after it.

"Well, the waves brought the ship to the shore. The sails, spread on the yards, hung in three rows, one on top of another. They were black, wet, full of holes, like a bandit's rags. The light wind inflated them at times, and then the ship moved back toward the sea; then again the middle stretch of canvas would begin to flap and hang and the ship returned to us, helpless like a cork upon the wave. The little port negro sailed up to it in his cork oak pirogue, clambered up the lines like a monkey and on to the deck. We looked. He made one step, then another, and then if he doesn't make a leap! Plump into his boat and to his oars! He sped over the water like a streak of light. He jumped ashore. . . . We look: he was as white as ashes with fright. His eyes rolled and rolled, his mouth shook, his knees struck one against the other. Not until we threatened him with a bullet in his head if he didn't talk and talk fast, did he mumble out what he had seen. The entire crew, the captain, the helmsman, all the voyagers to the last sailor, everything that breathed air, was dead of yellow fever and lying on deck like sheaves of hay. We saw it from afar, that cemetery travelling over the sea, and laughed at it amongst ourselves.



throng of officers that such and such a one went to rest a moment in the shade of the palms and magnolias.

“Oh, island, island!

“You seemed to us an earthly paradise when from afar we saw your beautiful Cibao Mountains, covered with pine and fragrant fir. Your lovely rivers flowed from out of them, Neyba, Artibonite, Yuna—of water as transparent as carved crystal. Moist warmth pulsed upon us from the low savannahs, from the thick depths of palm forests. . . . That wild, unpenetrated copiousness of herbs which covered the damp shores torn by the waves of the sea! The eyes could not look enough at the rosy-coloured flamingos, birds like flying flowers, which, chasing after fish, gladdened the level strands of the bay.

“We scarcely had set foot on that shore when our joyous eyes fell upon fan-like and reedy palms growing in whispering groves and wilds, upon tall ferns, tall as our pines and spruce-trees. We marched to the first city over a broad highway set with orange-, lemon- and Brazil-wood-trees. Wherever you looked, your dazzled eyes encountered figs, fields of sugar-cane, cacao-trees, tobacco, rice, millet, and corn. . . .

“The dreadful awakening comes very soon. These sea-shore savannahs are situated so low that they do not rise above the shallows of the bay. They are overgrown with manilla, a shrub similar to our henbane. These strands are drowned in the rainy season, which lasts through the major part of our winter holidays. Crabs, lizards, and reptiles die and rot, flooded in their tree-stumps and holes by the overflow of the rivers. In this manner one endless marsh forms over the sea, a bog full of unfathomed fires, a jungle belching with a rotten breath which smells of tar, and yet not tar. . . . A gnat, called the mosquito, cuts you so that a pimple and a blis-

ter comes out on the bitten place as though you had scalded yourself with boiling water. But what when, with the coming of spring, the fiery sun begins to bake the air! Such heat sets in that the end of the world seems nigh. A blood-sucking tick throws itself upon man and lays a bag with an egg in it under his nail, and this, in twenty-four hours, grows into a carbuncle, the size of a walnut, and then we have misery! Frightful pain and after it violent gangrene and death. Winged ants crawl over the walls and tables and bite one like things possessed. No matter if you are dying of weariness after an all-day march, as soon as they get into your bed, you up, my brother, and hie into the fields. Later we learned how to keep them away, but in the beginning, my dears, what we didn't suffer! Later we did not sleep otherwise than in tents, with a mahogany board for a table, and the raw hide of a bison suspended on poles for a bed, and rotten tree-stumps smouldering through the entire night to drive away the gnats.

"Oh, nights, nights!

"Many a time the wind had long begun to blow from the shore, the night was late, and you could not fall asleep. You are dozing apparently, but through your sleep you hear the frogs croaking as at home on a short, sultry July night. . . . The grasshopper chirps and chirps.

"Frightful storms came upon us, storms which human tongue cannot describe. The forests, bound together with lianas, were torn and rent for miles and the woods fell in swaths, like rye after a pelting rain-storm. The beasts fled like mad, and the frightful wind drove unnumbered flocks of birds upon the ocean and threw them into the water. We, accustomed to cereals and iron oats, had now as much as we wished of oranges, pineapples, apricots, cinnamon apples, pomegranates. You could rob the plantations of bananas and yellowish pink pistachios without stint or measure. But our

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soldiers did not do that. Just as the first day after landing, when we were given flat cakes of manioc, also called cassava, so we lived throughout our stay till the end, for they reminded us of our domestic, sifted-flour bread.

“How many battles, how many marches, skirmishes, mortal encounters! From the first to the last moment . . . The first battalion, under the command of a negro, General Clairvaux, attached to the negro half-brigades, set off to battle eight hours after landing. Soon, however, the negro general betrayed our side and went over to the side of the rebels, with all his black army. The Poles barricaded themselves in a church and offered valiant resistance; later, with a loss of a hundred and some odd soldiers, they stepped out of the trap and escaped to the fortress below Cap Français. Thanks only to the prowess of the Poles, that city was saved from attack and destruction. But just as it was fighting there, at Cap Français, this first battalion was smitten with disease. Of a thousand men who went into the city, in the course of one month there remained but eighty. The second battalion, in which I served, started out, at the command of Dessalines, the negro general, in the direction of the river Exter. We crossed the river Artibonite in pirogues made of a solid block of mahogany and reached a place called St. Marc. Several days later Dessalines, with a whole division of negroes, went over in the night to the side of the insurgents, who stood facing us, under the command of Christopher and Paul L'Ouverture. This was trouble indeed! One battalion of these negroes, four hundred men, black as ebony, was left behind. The treason of the others was not noted until almost day-break. Our one Polish battalion could not even dream of holding down and compelling to battle with their countrymen a force of four hundred strong and armed negroes. What to do with them? If we let them go at liberty, they

charged and returned to Europe. We embarked on a frigate going to Brest and were soon upon the sea. Here we drew our first deep breath. We came to France without mishap. We were assigned quarters in Châlons-sur-Marne and given half-pay. But as soon as one came back to himself one's nature pushed him back into the ranks. They announced a new campaign. Several of us entered the French army and once more march, march, march! Our hearts began to beat, for we were heading straight for Vienna. And we entered its open gates. Austerlitz! I beheld those Czechish and Moravian hills which as an Austrian foot-soldier I had crossed from end to end. Away, away in the distance, gleamed our own grey mountains. But it was not given me to step upon my native soil. At its very door I had to kneel and wait—they shattered my leg, cut it off. . . .”

“You are right!” Treпка threw in, in a hard, blunt voice. “At the beck of a usurper, to foster the intrigues of his co-mountebanks, you trampled free peoples, wiped out tribes. . . .”

“Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!” Pass no judgment, my friend. For only look what has happened: for twelve years we spilled our blood on the outskirts of the world. My brothers almost to a man went to their graves in mortal despair. And now! The German Empire scattered like a pile of chaff. We helped at Jena, at Auerstadt, and the Prussian nation is overthrown! Usurper! This same usurper is master of Berlin and master of Vienna. You don't know what you are saying. . . . Long live the Emperor! A hundred times! A thousand times! Eternal glory to him! And now, do you hear, the news reached me in one of the towns that he is coming. . . . To Warsaw! And, by the living God, it will be so! Armies are crossing my plains, where the Prussian has ruled. In their wake counties, cities, villages, rise from their

sleep. Now they will meet! Not one German is left there! And only I, who have circled the globe, waiting for this moment, will not go with them. But before I close my eyes, I shall know the rest. Long live the Emperor!"

Having said these words, the soldier drew his head between his shoulders and bent his whole figure, as if he wished to draw the rest of his thoughts into himself. The light of day was trickling in through the cracks in the shutters. The wax-candles had long gone out. Trepka pushed one window, then the other. The moist, fragrant cold of a dark autumn morn rushed into the close room.

Young Cedro appeared in the light of the morning like another man. He was standing in the same place, his hands knit on the back of a chair. His face was pale and peculiarly long. His hair was tousled as if by a gust of wind. Beneath his drooping lids his eyes were stern and thoughtful, fixed on the face of the soldier.

Suddenly he sighed and shuddered violently. A cold smile flitted over his face.

"Raphael!" he said in a ringing voice, searching his companion with his eyes.

The latter was sitting on a little stool, his head lying limply in his hands. He raised his forehead lazily. With an expression of peculiar irony he said: "I know, I know."

They smiled at each other, or at some new, unknown thought.

"The devil take it all!" Trepka hissed out, gnashing his teeth. He left the room, slamming the door behind him with a violent bang.

31. Stirrup-cup

THE river Pilitsa, upon which on the 28th of November 1806 fell the unlooked-for distinction of constituting the boundary between the Kingdom of Galicia and the six post-Prussian departments, was so attentively and solicitously watched that one could not even dream of crossing it. The patrolling soldiery allowed absolutely no one to pass, not even the post, and shot unconditionally at anyone who approached the river. The ultimate punishment—that is, death by hanging—designated by the Government of Galicia for the bold one who should dare to attempt to steal over to his brethren on the other side, paralysed the plans conceived long ago by Cedro and Raphael. Stephen Trepka slipped out in his britzka numerous times, now here, now there, in discreet quest of a possible crossing place. He returned cold, wet, hungry, and out of temper, swearing like a trooper. Three weeks passed in preparation and spying. Finally, in the middle of December, came secret tidings that the boundary along the Vistula, from the side of Silesia, was less watched, or, at least, that the cordon there was not so thick as on the Pilitsa. They decided to take advantage of this opportunity and to lose not a moment's time. To disguise their movements the two adventurers decided to set out as if on a hunt, on horseback and with dogs. They would not take the diligence until they reached Tarnov and would start from there as giddy-headed youths making for the carnival in Cracow. Trepka stayed behind. He was, as he said, too old for that sort of thing, and added something very learned in his justification, something of which his young friends would not hear.

The plan finally decided upon went into immediate effect.

heaven forbid, of the judgment of history. *Magistra vita*, do you observe, Olbromski?"

"Better have our breakfast served," Cedro interrupted.

A tureen of wine soup was brought into the dining-room, and the friends sat down for the last time to a common table. Trepka pushed his cup aside, went to his den, and brought out a small old bottle. He told the servant to open it and filled three wineglasses. He raised his and attempted to pronounce some toast or drink someone's health. For a long time he turned various words in his mouth, but save for the same French and Hungarian blasphemies, nothing came. His emotion imparted itself to Christopher. They fell into each other's arms and embraced one another for a long time, in silence, before they accomplished that toast.

"Nekanda!" Cedro called.

"Wait! Here— To our old, time-honoured right of existence! Blast it, I talk nonsense. . . . Here—a hundred million miseries!—here's that you may not add a new disgrace—"

"Listen, I adjure you!" Cedro continued his own; "as soon as we set out, get into the britzka and speed to Olshyna to inform my father."

"Good, good—"

"You will do that for me. The important thing is to obtain his forgiveness, to present the whole matter in its true light. Tell him, do you hear? Tell him that leaving, I knew how base a thing I was committing in respect to him."

"I will, I will, in the name of a hundred thousand . . ."

"Let them bring the horses!" Cedro muttered.

The boy was called and sent out to the stables, and in a short while the measured stamp of eight hoofs sounded in the yard. The three friends silently raised their goblets, filled

once more with old Hungarian. Their glances crossed like the swords of men taking oath. They put on their fur caps, ran out, and jumped into their saddles. Trepka, with uncovered head, followed them for a while across the yard, but the horses set off briskly, shot away, and vanished round the stables.

The day was hideous. A snow-storm blew, then a sudden shower of hail, which passed into a cold, drizzling rain. Trepka stood still for a moment and listened to the wind whistling round the corners of the house, wandering, amid sighs and groans, under the trees of the garden, running over the slippery fields, and bending the dry, bare stalks.

The two youths were covering the deserted road in a sharp gallop, making for the broad highway. In the distance loomed a dark forest, below it a village. Dim little flickers of light were already gleaming here and there in the small lowly windows of the rag- and straw-padded cottages. To right and left, into the hazy distance, ran fields dressed in black, rotten stubble. In the furrows nestled sheets of water, trembling and shrinking with cold. In a certain place, in the middle of a field, Christopher's eye fell upon a stone pile covered with a crawling skeleton of withered nettles. Whipped by the waves of a circling wind, a last wet, black leaf fluttered about its stem like a flapping rag.

"You too, farewell . . ." his lips breathed out.

Soon they were flying across the fields, their ears and mouths full of wind. They whizzed past the road leading to Olshyna. Far off, to the side, stood Christopher's home. He cast but one sidelong glance in its direction. In the misty morning haze he saw the vague, dark outlines of the barns, their stone abutments, their large, broad roofs, and above them huge, barren trees, whose crowns swayed in the wind. In the depths of the garden rose the two white chimneys of

the house. Smoke was already stealing from them and pulsing upward into the clouds. Christopher rose in his stirrups, shifted in the saddle, and lashed the horse with his whip. They had yet to cross the birch wood to reach the main highway, they were just nearing its edge.

Suddenly Raphael pulled in his horse with a cry of terror.

From out the thick trees came the elder Cedro, wading down the muddy trail straight upon the riders. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes had fallen into their pits, his hair, no longer black, fell in grey wisps from beneath his hat. His clothing was put on hurriedly, askew. Walking unceasingly, the old man dragged himself to the neck of the horse, to the stirrup in which rested the foot of his son. Christopher saw him. The white, cultivated hand, the hand which had aged so beautifully, began to slide helplessly over the muddy stirrup-strap, over the spattered leg of the boot. The head raised itself with difficulty, and the tear-flooded eyes, blind with despair, sought the face of the child. The lips, those lips always smiling, never stained by vulgar pain, were now full of weeping, of sobs, of toothless mumbling.

"Christy, Christy . . ."

The arms shivered and the hands shook as if they were being seared with a white-hot iron.

"Christy, Christy . . ."

The feet tangled confusedly, stepping one on the other. It was apparent that he could not keep his footing, that another moment and he would fall to the ground like a reed broken by the wind. With unconscious movements the hands sought to pull the son to the ground, caught his sleeve, his pocket . . .

"I will call . . . the farm-hands. I will tie you—lock you . . ." the lips mumbled.

Christopher dropped the reins with a slow, insane movement. A deathly pallor came over his face.

His eyes were half-closed, his lips compressed. He bent down slowly and took the hands of the old man, as if he sought to fetter him, as if he wished to bind, to hamper for ever those dolorous, lovely hands. He raised them both and pressed them to his breast with a groan. Their heads touched, their breaths mingled, their powerless bodies were drawn together by an inexpressible might.

It seemed to Raphael that that moment would never end. He was sure that all was lost.

But suddenly Christopher awoke and lifted himself. His eyes opened wide and a frightful expression of strength changed his face as if into an iron mask. With a hard, brutal movement he thrust off the open arms of his father. He sighed. He struck his horse a powerful blow. Both steeds reared, leaped, and set off at a lightning pace. Christopher did not cease to belabour his. They flew with a dull, heavy clatter of hoofs, racing the wind, bent in their saddles. They caught the cold snow-storm with sobbing breasts. They sped on, faster, faster, faster. . . . They plunged into the mists of the distance, into a boundless cloud, into the whistling, hissing wind.

32. Yaz

THEY reached Cracow about noon of a cold, December day. The sturdy team harnessed to a crude Cracovian britzka was well heated and the travellers out of patience. They were anxious to slip into the city at once and unobserved and to appear at the home of a certain gentleman, a cousin of Trepka, who was to guide their further course.

Stephen Trepka's friends and relatives facilitated for Cedro and his companion the obtaining of a passport to Vienna, whither the two were allegedly hastening for the carnival. Christopher's frequent excursions to the Danubian capital, attested by the visés on old passports, his father's spotless loyalty, and other collateral circumstances, made the problem easier. There were some difficulties with the passport of Olbromski, but these too were broken, or rather avoided, by means of a subterfuge. Raphael now bore an assumed name. The two friends provided themselves with travelling-costumes of dark-green broadcloth, since, as they knew, such material was difficult to obtain in the "country of the Poles" beyond the Vistula and the Pilitsa. They hired a sleigh to the first stop, which, in accordance with the ingeniously laid plan, happened just at the Vistula, on an estate named Yaz, and, on the eve of Christmas eve, they set out.

The persons aiding them in their plan had chosen several points along the river where one might cross the frontier. One of the first places on this list was occupied by Yaz, the estate of Chamberlain Olovski. It was the most indifferent thing in the world to the two conspirators where they were to smuggle themselves across, when all of a sudden Raphael heard from the lips of a certain dandy, a cousin of Trepka, that the wife of Mr. Olovski was a Princess Gintult, one

of the sisters of Prince John Gintult of Grudno. That aroused him somewhat. Indifferently, without a sign, without even a desire to exert any pressure, he directed their plans in such a way that they were to go to Yaz in the first place and to try to cross there first of all. It was a matter of complete indifference to him which of the princesses he would see at that opportunity, but curiosity, a lazy desire to look at a face long unseen, urged him on. Both looked splendid in their frock-coats, purported to be the last word in Viennese fashions, and their tight, buckled unmentionables, which wanted only galloons and cords to be transformed into artillery uniforms.

Very precious were these uniforms! Rolls of ducats were expertly sewed into their linings. In the bosoms of their coats were concealed a Venetian stiletto and a small fire-arm for possible contingency. Their stylish hats and fur coats, however, gave them the typical appearance of light-headed youths hastening riotously in quest of amusement.

On the eve of Christmas-day, toward evening, they were in Yaz. They stopped at a tavern by the highway. The two-story palace, or rather the two-story stone building, without ornament, recently built, peered from a wooded hillock at a considerable distance from the Vistula. Olbromski scanned the country-side and nature of the ground minutely under a pretence of solicitude over the horses. Cedro, pretending to be getting ready to spend the night at the inn, began to interrogate the tavern-keeper like a man coming from distant parts: who lives in the palace, what is his name, does he have children? The object was to remove all possible suspicion. Conversation with the innkeeper yielded a sad truth; it proved that in the last few days a division of Austrian dragoons, with an officer at their head, had been sent to Yaz for the purpose of patrolling the Vistula with the strictest rigour.



The soldiers, the innkeeper went into details, were posted through the village at the very edge of the river, and even the officer had his quarters, not in the palace, but in a peasant's hut. The patrol rubbed elbows with the patrol of the neighbouring village. At night they burned fires along the whole line and watched right properly. If anyone came near the river from one side or the other, a bullet in the head, and the game was over. In this manner the Vistula, separating Silesia, which was already in the hands of the French, from Galicia, still under Austrian rule, was guarded in no idle fashion. Cedro, without losing his dashing mien, his capital indifference and verve, as if this information did not concern him in the least, began to ask about the owners of the estate.

He learned that the owner himself was in Vienna, but that he was expected for the holidays; that the lady was giving a great ball, which would be attended by many persons from the vicinity; that even the officer commanding the division of dragoons had been invited. The two friends consulted each other loudly, in the presence of the innkeeper and of the servants, whether it would not be worth while, out of respect for so great a holiday, to pay a visit to the lady of the manor and to ask her hospitality for the first day of the holidays, since they were making their journey to Vienna at such a time. After long deliberation and much argument they decided that it behooved them to repair at once to the palace. They went there on foot. Dusk was already falling when they entered the avenues of the park.

Raphael was now swept by a certain uneasiness. A numb, long-dead world, rejected decisively, repulsed amid labour of soul with all his young strength, was now so near. . . . He would not be any more interested if this should be Princess Elizabeth herself. But to see someone from those wondrous


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that it could not have been otherwise in his life. He had to come here. He had a passing sensation of something resting on his arm, something like a cold hand. . . . This created in him a swift excitement, an excitement giving rise to a pleasurable fear. He seemed to breathe with this feeling.

They rounded a corner of the palace seeking an entrance and finally came upon a frequented, warm side-door. It was open and led into a dark hall. They looked to the right, then to the left, into the servants' quarters, until at length they encountered an old lackey in everyday costume and wakened him from his doze. Learning that they came from Cracow and that they wished to see the mistress on a matter of business, the man began to bustle about, to beg their pardon, but finally took them to the reception rooms. They found themselves in a small, excellently heated little salon, the furniture of which was barely visible in the fading twilight. Somewhere, in a murky corner, on the top of a low Napoleonic secretary, a clock was going gaily, a clock endowed with a voice, which, it seemed, served to measure the duration of these charming, joyous moments of life. The man lit several wax-candles, took the two calling-cards with the names of the visitors written thereon and adorned with exquisite vignettes etched on brass by Cracow's most fashionable artist, and withdrew. The flames of the candles, dim at first, expanded gradually and their yellow light filled the salon.

Raphael had a waking dream that he was as if in Warsaw. . . . He is waiting for Helen de With—or isn't he? In a moment she will come in, in a moment she will appear. . . . Is it possible? Helen de With . . . The rapture of waiting thrust off the blows of reality, and through clenched teeth he whispered inwardly to himself: "Be still, be still. . . . Hush, hush. . . ."

Beyond the windows, which the frost had coated with tiny

crystal branches, the naked crowns of the trees hummed dully and monotonously. Christopher sat rapt in thought, his head leaning on his hand, and his eyes buried in the flame of the candle. At some moment, when the waiting began to prolong itself unduly, he raised his head and said: "What the deuce! Won't anyone come?"

Raphael trembled from head to foot, so strong and foreign a blow was the voice of his friend in that world where his soul was wandering. Unguided, his hand touched a leather-bound album, beautifully embossed and gilded on the corners and back. He opened it and on the very first pages came upon water-colour views of Grudno. He turned a few sheets and found "his" alley. The artist sought to seize and transfer to the cold leaf the live, green radiance which filled the depths of the darkened path and to render the ineffable beauty of its melancholy. . . . But he had caught only the tints, the crude colours. Abject and powerless were his attempts, although he was no common artist. For one beholder, however, he did succeed in evoking a feeling of reality, a clear reminiscence of that which was never to return, in presenting to the eyes of the spirit, for a second time, a moment of a day which was dead for all time. This beholder was Olbromski. He forgot where he was. His eyes sank in the page. He was again in the enchanted circle of the days when, after the death of his brother, he was alone in the world, chased from home, when, thrust among people wholly strange to him and new from head to foot, he had to forge his way through their midst, to make for his soul a wide and far-flung highway.

"Alley," he now whispered, "my alley . . ."

In the depths, in the hazy distance of the drawing, one could see the outlet of the tree-way. That was the door, he mused, a bitter smile on his lips, through which one left the



world of magic for the world of fact. . . . Christopher was saying something to him. He could not and would not hear his words. He looked at the aquarelle which he had before him and strove to find what was hidden behind the curtain of its colours. He became like a man engrossed in a favourite melody, which wakes and torments the soul, which stirs and revives a death-smitten heart. What would he not give to have that priceless picture for his own!

Christopher, likewise, found something for himself. Several books lay on the little table. He opened one of them at the place where it was divided by an embroidered bookmark and began to read, his nose, as was his custom, sliding over the pages. The text which he found engrossed him so that he rose from his place in search of better light and, leaning towards the flame of the candle, his profile coming into splendid outline as he did so, plunged body and soul into his reading. From time to time he turned instinctively to Raphael in order to communicate to him the unusual thoughts which now illumined his forehead like a self-existent radiance, but a fresh onslaught of thoughts, surging apparently from the verses of the book, cast him into an ever deeper, more absorbing, more complete amazement. They were now separated from each other by infinite worlds of space.

In the mean while at the *portière* of the salon spread a silken rustle. Pressed with a light foot, some one of the tiles of the poplarwood parquetry creaked cautiously. The two friends did not notice this. The rustle ceased. The former silence resumed its sway. Only the small gay marble clock continued to measure the happy time. . . .

Suddenly Christopher, unable to endure it any longer, almost shouted: "Listen! Listen! This is something phenomenal . . . Why, I have thought this a thousand—what do I say?—a hundred thousand times!"





"What, what have you thought? Don't shout like that!"

"I have thought the same thing!"

"But what?"

"These are my own thoughts! Raphael! If I could tell you in words what a joy and what a strange pain it is to find one's thoughts affirmed and uncovered, taken out of the dark!"

"What phenomenal thoughts are you talking about?"

"Here, at last, I find myself! It always seemed to me that I was out of my mind when I dreamed such things, and here he voiced these same things so long ago! He had measured it all with his inconceivable wisdom. How he speaks! Just listen. . . . O Rousseau, Rousseau!— Listen. . . ."

He raised his eyes to Raphael, but the book fell out of his hands. He grew confused and with an elegant bow made two steps back. Raphael, noting his confusion and movements, rose from his place and turned about.

Standing before him was Princess Elizabeth.

No, not the Princess of old. It was Mrs. Olovská, twice, three times, ten times as beautiful as a woman, but not the Princess Elizabeth of old. It was a beauty of twenty-six summers, splendid and blooming like the loveliest of flowers at the end of spring.

Raphael could not wonder enough, gaze enough, at this change, this passing of one form of beauty into another, still more ravishing form. Mrs. Olovská was dressed in an ultra-stylish little frock of bright brick hue, not reaching the knees, and a white, shortish dress. On her uncovered neck and arms she wore a green shawl with richly embroidered borders. Her hair was combed differently now. Locks of it shaded her forehead and a huge coil was tied in a knot at the back of her head.

For a few moments she measured the visitors with a rather

lofty, though coquettish look, before she acknowledged their bows. At length she moved graciously towards Christopher, returning bow for bow. She said: "I am happy to greet you, gentlemen."

She received Raphael somewhat differently, but not as in Grudno.

She mentioned, in a broken half-word, that she had already had the pleasure of meeting him long ago. Listening to that voice and looking at that figure, Olbromski counted the moments which remained before their departure. He was glad that not many of them were left. An uncommon burden was oppressing his breast. He dropped his eyes to the floor, and, while Christopher was entertaining their hostess with polite conversation, he grovelled in horrid thoughts. While wandering thus in their throng, he came upon one which consoled him at once: "I am going into the army and that's that. I'll be a strapping soldier. What do I care about her? There is no lord like an uhlan, and no arms like a pike!"

He raised his eyes with his old insolence and met the glance of Mrs. Olovska.

It, too, was not as of old. The beautiful eyes looked into his face calmly, boldly, and long, the same and yet different. They did not darken now, no thick veil came over them from the hidden fires of her soul, they did not cloud with mists of shame from a secret onslaught of feelings. Not any more! They looked aggressively, with intent scrutiny. At times savage and dreadful glints flickered in them like lightning-bolts in a cloudy sky. Her lips held an inexhaustible store of smiles for Cedro. Likewise of gracious words, gracious and full of goodness.

"I was informed of your plans," she said, "and everything was coming out in the best manner possible. But now unforeseen difficulties have developed. How unfortunate!" she

continued, rather indifferently, reading the note of Trepka's cousin. "Soldiers are in the village. They are also in the neighbouring village, and so many of them, such hordes. . . . Soldier sees soldier, they almost touch hands. They burn fires at night and shout so that one cannot sleep."

"Yes, we heard of this arrival of troops on our way to the palace," Cedro said with a bow.

"And it doesn't dissuade you from your hazardous undertaking?"

"No, not a whit."

"Indeed, that is truly knight-like. I sincerely admire your courage."

Saying this, she measured Raphael with a sneeringly aggressive look. After a moment she added: "Since it is so, we must wade on."

"Madam. . . ."

"The word is spoken, or, rather, written. But I warn you that the matter is really dangerous now. In cases where fugitives are caught, the authorities have no thought of treating the matter lightly. I have heard from the most trustworthy persons that they simply put a cord round one's neck in the most vulgar manner and hang him on a gibbet or on the rafter of the first barn they come to."

"To cap the ill fortune, my husband has not yet returned from Vienna. He was to be here—although, as a matter of fact, he would be of no assistance in this affair as an active helper, for he holds different principles, and so far has not acknowledged Napoleon as emperor—" she added, with a smile of barely, barely perceptible irony. "But in the event of a serious mishap he would have to use some trifle from the treasure-chest of his connexions and influences, which I—"

"Madam, please be good enough to be entirely open with

us," Cedro begged. "If our crossing should entail the least unpleasantness for you—"

"Oh, no, no! I like to fight difficulties and I like this sort of unpleasantness. One must once in a while, around Christmas time, undergo a bit of emotion. Without that medicine life would congeal in us, our blood would stop flowing."

"Is emotion such a difficult thing in these parts?"

"It is always difficult for women, not only in these parts, to experience the shocks which shake the world. I have already instructed and directed my husband's plenipotentiary and he undertook to arrange things. The plan is, or rather was, as follows: on St. Stephen's there will be a gathering in this house and a dance. You, as travellers, will oblige me and spend the holidays here and attend the ball, at which you will dance gaily and much. But in the night, at a given signal, you will have to steal away stealthily and follow the guide without a moment's resistance, hesitation, or delay, and cross the Vistula in a row-boat—Is it agreed?"

"Madam—" said Cedro, rising from his chair.

"Let us say nothing as yet, since the thing is not accomplished. The Vistula is not wide here, but one doesn't jump across it so easily."

"For us it is entirely as if we were already on the other side. And so the day after tomorrow we begin to fight," he said, turning to Raphael with his sincere, enthusiastic, almost childish smile.

"And that you, who, I heard, had such prospects in Vienna and could entertain such high hopes, let yourself venture on the slippery fields of treacherous Bellona! Without regret or contrition you abandon one emperor for another—"

"I hear of my Viennese successes with amazement. There

is more rumour than truth in the report, and as for the emperor, I worship only one. Long live the Emperor!"

"I heard of your successes from my husband, who knows everything that happens in Vienna. He knows what the slippers creak, what frock-coats rustle, what doors scrape and door-knobs say. Ah, and perhaps it is your companion who enticed you upon the field of glory?" she asked after a moment.

"I really don't know. It seems that the same spark touched us both. Beyond the Pilitsa the whole country is getting on horseback!"

"Yes, so I heard. And you, sir, when it comes to getting on horseback, are always first?" asked the beautiful lady, turning to Raphael.

"Yes—" he answered in a hard, foreign voice, "it seems to me that I was and am created for the saddle."

He found a deep satisfaction in the sound of these words, in their harshness. For still another moment he fondly plunged his thought into a contemplation of his strength. It seemed to him that his soul was growing and enlarging within him. He was no longer the little squireling's son at whom everyone looked askance. His eyes looked boldly and he ceded only so much of his soldierly stiffness and pride as was indispensable to the preservation of drawing-room forms. Not a shadow of his former fright.

Through an inexplicable concurrence of moods Mrs. Olovská, it would seem, understood the state of his soul. She was almost vanquished. In her movements, her manner of speaking, in the inclination of her head when she turned to listen to what he would say, there showed something like respect, like an effort to repair a wrong. But at the same time her behaviour began to gain an ineffable charm, something innately attractive, natural, beautiful, without any calculation or effort. Her eyes had an expression of greater sweetness,

though in the first moments a thunderbolt glittered in them.

Raphael began to look into them as much as he could, as much as was permissible. He didn't even notice when and how he yielded to the dangerous sway of those eyes, almost humble and abashed. Longer and longer lasted the moments when he could not tear his gaze from the arches of her lids, shaded with the bluish shadow of lovely lashes, from the expression of her eyes, into which had descended all the magic of the heavens at day-break and all the charm of fully blossomed spring. He was swept by an impulse of inexpressible curiosity, as if at the sight of a suddenly uncovered naked sea, a desert, or a chain of snow-capped mountains. And in the wake of this elemental feeling there flowed into his breast in fragrant billows an invincible luxury of admiration. Now only he began to feel, rather than see, the unequalled formation of her brow, gleaming with the whiteness of snow or of a block of Carrara marble, a brow which housed unknown thoughts, unfamiliar, subtle, beautiful, like music coming out of the darkness of night, and young as the billows of a well-spring. Now only he began to take unto himself, to possess himself of the rosy shading of her cheek which melted into the whiteness of the face as imperceptibly as the morning dawn fades into the azure brilliance of day. Only a moment ago he had seen almost nothing outside of his recollection, stern and uniform in its content. Now his eye did not fail to catch the wondrous changes of light and shade circling about the delightful lips, or the thickness of the braid of hair which, without doubt, he could not have clasped with his soldier's fist. Every gesture of her pampered hands, almost transparent with idleness, had in it a disturbing witchery. There was something stifling in this beauty, something which stopped one's breath and made one's head swim. Looking thus without cease, his rapture grew in pace with his amazement. But



above all he was bewitched by her natural charm free of the least trace of art, of ingratiating, of coquetry, by the ease with which she cast her subtle unequalled, regal spell. A soft, gracious look, a few gentle, homely words, and Raphael would feel within himself the pressure of a terror as great as in his most difficult days. And when he was almost beside himself, not knowing what was happening, he still continued to hear calm, charming words, full of innocent joyousness and a natural quietude of spirit. In his veins began to seethe and tear blood, as if another's, gushing from an eternal well-spring of rapture. The expression of his face must have changed very greatly then, for several times the beautiful lady rested her eyes on him for a longer time.

Just then the servant came in and drew the heavy curtains over the windows. From beyond these draperies now came a muffled clatter of wind, a pleasant sound, like goading, inciting cries, like applause. The glare of the candles filled the little room with a delightful, yellow light. A second servant came in and informed his mistress that the plenipotentiary was waiting. She asked that he come in. A moment later a tall man came in, dressed in Polish costume, with blond sheaf-like moustaches. He had a large face, fat, red from the wind, with bulging and fiery eyes. He wheezed as though he were out in the field, minding those present but very little.

"Mr. Kalvicki, our beloved guardian," said Mrs. Olovská. "And here are the two traitors. Shall I give their names?"

"They are called Poles, and their miens are not too bad, so why should I have their names?" the moustached one wheezed out. "At least when they put me to the rack, I shan't be able to betray their names and I shan't have to bandy my word of honour in vain."

"We are very pleased to know you," Cedro bowed. "Your protection and help—"



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"Ah well—help! That's the problem—I am delighted to make your acquaintance. . . . I've been thinking since last evening, ever since my lady came out with—er—her readiness of helping your worths. And it isn't an easy thing with our lady. 'I'm bored, I'm bored,' she will say, and what can you do? Obstinacy—"

"Mr. Kalvicki, Mr. Kalvicki—keep yourself, I beg of you, in check!"

"I'm mute. My tongue is well behind my moustache."

"Draw it back farther, for I might cut it, and that would hurt."

"Because you refuse to think of it and yet this smells of the thickest rope. We may get into such a mess that not only our boots, but our legs will stick in it."

"Let your legs stick, and particularly—those boots. . . ."

"I wish to say something more—"

"I'm not listening any longer."

"I must, nevertheless, tell you that I've finally invited that jackass of an officer for St. Stephen's. What I didn't go through with that foul piece!"

"That's very good. I commend your labour."

"I think so too. That is very good."

"And what more, grand-daddy? Only swiftly, without eloquence!"

"There you are! Grand-daddy! That isn't fair—"

"What more? I ask my plenipotentiary?"

"There you are—immediately the lordly tone. I must add still that we shall have to provide at least a vat of beer for the dragoons. My God! I almost have a sunstroke when I think—"

"Let them have a vat—"

"My hair stands up on end, my lady, at the very thought of what will happen when the master comes back."

“I am not interested in your hair.”

“And so it comes about that in my old days I have to expose, if not my breast, then my back, to bullets, for I speak plainly, the poltroons are not joking. I will drive you myself in the night, but what the result will be . . .” he added in an undertone, coming up to Christopher.

While these two exchanged quiet words, Mrs. Olovská walked away from them. She casually adjusted a lovely screen “*à la Psyché*” and then suddenly stopped directly in front of Raphael. For a few moments her eyes were lowered and an enchanting smile played on her lips.

Slowly she raised her azure eyes and rested them on the face of her guest. The smile did not leave her lips, but became more luminous, more and more unearthly. Her nostrils quivered swiftly.

When Cedro took the arm of the old squire and, engrossed in a lively conversation, began to walk with him up and down the room, Mrs. Olovská made still another step toward Raphael and, without taking her eyes off his face, said through her teeth in such a way that only he could hear the words: “I am looking—for the trace of my riding-whip. . . .”

Olbromski stood motionless, but staggered at the sound of these words. A flame of fire suffused his face, his neck, his forehead. The words rang through his ears like the whiz of a steel lash. Slowly his blood flowed back to his heart.

Just as the others came up to the table, Mrs. Olovská smilingly opened the album of drawings and, showing Raphael landscape after landscape, said with a gracious indifference: “Grudno.”

She turned page after page, gazing now at this, now at another combination of colours. When the picture of the

tree-way appeared, Raphael held it longer and asked: "May one ask who painted this view?"

"One may."

"Who was it?"

"The same one who painted the whole album, one can see that."

"Who is it?"

"I painted it."

"May one ask why you chose this alley? There were many far more beautiful places in Grudno."

"Because it was my most beloved nook. I walked here oftenest of all."

"I see. . . ."

During the supper, to which their little party of four sat down in one of the adjoining rooms, Raphael found himself beside the old plenipotentiary and had to enter with him into a wide discourse *de omni re scibili*. In the mean while the mistress of the house chattered as pleasantly and animatedly with Christopher as though they had been friends for years and years. Raphael heard their whole conversation. He tried to choke his mad jealousy, he pushed it to the bottom with merciless will. At a certain moment he thought with an iron determination: "I'll throttle that milksop!" After that he could talk freely. Not for one moment, not for one twinkling of an eye, did the regal head turn toward him, the head weighted with the splendid coils of hair. Not once did her eye notice him. Now only, he recognized that this was the same Princess Elizabeth who used to fill him with boundless torment and of whom he had rid himself by such dour but efficient means. The same. She sees him and does not see him, hears him and does not hear him, knows of him and does not know. . . . And so he has only come back to the old place

after travelling such a vast stretch of earth. . . . He was amazed within himself at this order of events, this seeming law governing in the dark. Something like an insatiable greed for the old suffering rose in his breast like a frenzied storm. He challenged her, pulled her toward him with his will. He began to spy in the old way from under his lids, from the ambush of his eyelashes, upon the charm of that face, the mysteries of that lovely bosom. His eyes returned from the tortuous paths of these espials almost with despair, to face the incontrovertible truth that that beauty had not decreased, that on the contrary it had grown, that it had become equal to infinity. What was worst of all, she was now conscious of her power and wielded it as a warrior wields his sword. As a result of all this his head was so confused that he replied to the questions of Plenipotentiary Kalvicki with answers that were but barely sane. From his eyes when he turned them on the beauty, blazed fires of an internal conflagration which he could not stifle by any effort. Mrs. Olovskas's indifference brought him to the brink of madness. He rose from the table with a feeling of joyous relief and in about an hour retired for his rest. Like a man dazed, he followed the lackey who lit them up the stairs; he passed various rooms and at length found himself in a small, heated chamber. It adjoined a second room, in which Christopher was asleep. Raphael undressed and threw himself upon the bed. He fell asleep immediately.

33. Night and Morning

THE orchestra, placed in the gallery, was tuning its instruments. From the deep vestibule new figures emerged at frequent intervals and slowly ascended the marble stairs. Silken rustles, whiffs of fragrance, came from below. Voices hummed in buzzing waves. . . .

Thousands of wax-candles threw their blaze upon the pillars of dark marble which supported the ceiling of the vestibule. Near one of these pillars stood Mr. Olovski, a man still young, with a subtle, delicate, and beautiful face. His blue eyes were sunken beneath a pale forehead, and in the short intervals between one compliment and another, between one and another greeting of newly-arrived guests, a forced smile slid off his face like a mask.

Beside a second pillar stood Kalvicki in his most resplendent *kontusz*; ¹ still lower, on a platform where the stairs turned, a liveried servitor bowed before every entering pair and with a magnificent movement of his right hand pointed to the master of the house.

Kalvicki was awaiting the officer whom he had brought personally and left in a little dressing-room below, where he might spruce and trim himself after his own fashion and to his heart's content. At length the lieutenant appeared. He walked briskly up the stairs, in his semi-frock-coat, gleaming with epaulets and stripes, in light unmentionables and boots, pursing his lips proudly and unconstrainedly. The servant bent before him twice, very low, and made a few side steps in front of him, lest the German make a mistake as to the person of the host. Kalvicki greeted the guest in broken,

¹ *Kontusz*, a long coat, part of former Polish national costume.—*Translator's note.*

Mr. Olovski in excellent German, and with great attention, compliments, and bows led him into the salon.

There the little *canapés* and chairs standing along the walls were already filled with selected numbers of the most beautiful ladies of the vicinity. In the doors leading to the other salons crowded a host of dancers. The middle of the ball-room was empty. Near its principal door stood Mrs. Olovska, greeting her guests.

Her hair, arranged that day in a peculiar fashion, was caught with two bands of laurel. Her neck and arms gleamed between the wide puffs of her sleeves. A light, exquisitely beautiful dress, with roses pinned into the front of the skirt, a *robe de gaze, à raies de satin*, of the colour of sea-water, was hemmed at the bottom with camellia-leaves and covered the legs to a point just above the ankles. Long gloves, reaching almost to the shoulder, covered her bare arms. At the waist, beneath the veiled breast, trembled a corsage of violets of Parma. When the lieutenant entered and bowed before her with the exquisite grace of a Viennese, she, like her husband, received him with honours. She asked him to give her his arm and walked with him across the empty floor of the salon to a group of dignified citizens and gave his name.

A moment later her satin boots slid over the parquetry to the open door of the main entrance.

In a group of young men at the opposite door of the salon stood Olbromski and Cedro. Perceiving the German, they realized that their epos was beginning. To Christopher this sight was a zestful stimulus; to Raphael a thrust of a poniard.

It behooved them to decide quickly.

In the course of those two days Raphael's face fell and his eyes rolled with an unhealthy glitter. His passionate, frenzied love increased from hour to hour, his lust, impregnated with a sense of loss, swelled to insane proportions. Looking at his

beautiful hostess, he felt no joy, no rapture, only a helpless, bleeding despair. He was now about to stake everything on the hazard of a card, to decide, in the course of the next few hours, one way or another, to decide about his entire future. He had spent two days seeking a meeting with her. But the house was full of guests, of new-comers, of neighbours, every one of whom he slaughtered and quartered with such looks as he might have been excused in giving his deadliest enemies. He was constantly obliged to talk with someone, to greet, to bid farewell, to hide the conspirator, and, worst of all, to laugh. The result was that at times he laughed so peculiarly that cold shivers ran through his interlocutors. At times he noticed her somewhere off in the throng. His lips then whispered almost audible words of worship, of praise, caressing nonsense, or deadly and dangerous blasphemies which had settled upon his ears and lips in the dungeons of the Oravian castle. More than once, in a delirious, mindless frenzy, he forged his way to her to make clean breast of it once and for all, to tell her what was happening to him. But when he came near and heard her talking gaily, coquettishly, delightfully, he walked away, his soul shattered by her laugh, a faint smile on his lips.

In this way he lived through the two holidays.

Now he stood in the crowd, dressed according to the latest mode, and did not take his eyes off his idol.

How beautiful she was!

Her head resembled an ancient cameo graven by the hand of a Greek on white bands of onyx. Her hair was held in by the branches of laurel, twined like its colourful coils. Her dark brown eyebrows met almost imperceptibly over the line of the nose in a down of scarcely noticeable hue, and their delicious union was like the picture of a kiss. Never did snowy temples contrast more wondrously with the glowing

to pull Christopher to him. It even seemed to him that he had drawn him over. . . . In the mean while Cedro stood erect, staring attentively with his poor-sighted eyes at the figure of the Austrian officer.

Raphael's hand rested on the shoulder of his companion, and his crooked lips coughed out: "Christy, are you afraid?"

The other started as if touched on the naked flesh with a piece of ice.

"I am not afraid!" he answered, exactly like a child accused of a lie which it has not told.

"I—"

"What is the trouble with you?"

"I thought that you were afraid."

"You'd do better to breathe a prayer to God to grant us a successful night than to trouble and weaken me."

"Fool . . ." Raphael whispered straight into his ear.

"One must wait," he thought, "there is still time. . . ."

Suddenly a brilliant idea illuminated him. When the moment of departure came, he would hide somewhere in the palace and let the opportune moment pass unused. He would then pretend that he was drunk. A drunken man is not responsible for his actions, and his honour does not suffer. He would come out when all would be lost, at day-break. Christopher, if he wanted to, might go alone. Certainly, let him go, let him cross auspiciously in keeping with his prayers, or let him die of the dragoons' bullets! By all means let him go across the Vistula, to all the devils! He had already collected his measure of smiles and gracious half-words. . . .

Once more he experienced a profound relief. A fragrant wind of a delightful future wafted across his forehead. He saw before him a whole series of radiant days.

Just then the orchestra began to play the polonaise, and the lofty, magnificent sound-waves lifted Raphael's new re-



solve upon their wings. He soared in a nebula of happiness regained. He floated in a radiant mist. The ancient gentleman who led this dance with Mrs. Olovská disappeared from his sight in the adjoining rooms, then appeared once more. Uncovered arms and bosoms, hair studded with pearls and intertwined with ribbons, curled and gleaming with stones, the glitter and rustle of costly satins, the flashing of diamonds, the smell of perfume, the magic of glances, of smiles, of music, floated about like billows of delight. Here are the couples, gliding past, one after another. . . . There floats by, like a frothy cloud-ring, a maiden, her hair dressed à *Poiseau de paradis*. . . . Farther on rustle gowns bordered with fur *en lapin de Moscovie*, heads half-covered, in toques *de gaze argentée*, in turbans à *pointe mameluk*, in Levantine and Egyptian robes.

The polonaise was scarce ended when a melodious waltz drew all the youth into its whirl. Raphael longed to dance with Elizabeth, but he could not seize even one moment so happy. Someone was always waltzing with her, or else she disappeared from his view in the performance of her duties as hostess. He danced, therefore, with persons who were near him, simply in order not to stand in place. Once only, almost at midnight, he had the good fortune to skim the length of the salon with his treasure in his arms. Words fled from his lips; his very thoughts, it seemed, had stopped. He did not find one word, although he strove to speak. He kept silent, his teeth clenched.

Midnight passed and Christopher began to send his eyes in search of his companion more and more frequently. Raphael heard the striking of the approaching hour in his heart, in his head, in the marrow of his bones. The youth directing the dances announced the fashionable English country dance, in which almost the entire company was to

take part. Despite all his efforts, Raphael did not succeed in dancing with Elizabeth. The good fortune came to him early in the next dance, the lancers. He had learned this dance in Warsaw, he knew, therefore, that dancing *vis-à-vis*, he would have the opportunity to be with her during certain moments. He dreamed with closed eyes of what would be.

Oh, if he could only tell her the torment of his soul! To go away, go away without a word. . . . He showered his partner, a young lady taken at random, with a multitude of merry, witty words, pleasant and thoughtless. He entertained her like a gay giddy-pate, jeering at her at the same moment with eyes full of contempt and aversion and cursing her inwardly with the most hideous names. Amidst the cascade of words directed to his dancer, he dreamed of the other, the daughter of heaven and of day. The dance began.

In the very first figure, when he was left alone with Mrs. Olovská, she said to him in a low voice: "In a few hours. . . ."

"What, Princess?" his white lips whispered.

"I must remind you so unhospitably. . . . In a few hours you will go."

"I should rather die here than on the river."

They were divided by a flowing, charming glide. She went away amid bows, a smile on her lovely face. Only a faint blush. . . . A few moments later, however, the dance gave her to him again. Then, from the bottom of a heart which tugged at its ropes, he whispered: "Princess—"

"Yes?"

"Princess—"

"I am no longer a princess, kind sir. Those times have passed long ago—"

"Those times have passed long ago, but my unhappiness—"

"What is your trouble?"

"I should not have permitted you to stay one hour under this roof. Only higher considerations—"

"Only a few hours more—I will go away immediately and never come back."

"Let it be so."

"Not one word of pity—"

"He speaks of pity, the insolent one who dared—"

"Madam, madam—I loved you above all things in life. That is why—I only wished to tell you this—"

"What is done, is done."

She left him once more. The sound of these words enveloped him like fragrant smoke. "What is done is done." What can these words mean? What can these words mean? What can they mean? He exerted all the power of his intellect in order to seize their meaning. But before he could form the least concept, she flitted by him in the ceaseless to and fro of the dance.

When, for a moment, they were again together, she resumed: "You will never come back here? You have said so yourself?"

"Yes, I have."

"And you vouch for it with your honour?"

"Go away, go away, as fast as one can—ha ha—"

"You will never try to see me?"

He was silent.

"Speak."

"I cannot promise that. If I live, I will make every effort to see this place in secret. But no one shall know of it."

"Swear that you will not do this, and you may hear something which will—"

"I swear upon my life, my honour, my good name, that I cannot—I love you—"



“Don’t—don’t—”

A moment later she spoke again: “Listen to what I say.— I should always like to remember my tree-way in Grudno as I remember it now. Always in the same way— I like that passion in me. There it was I used to go in the evening to scorn your brigand assault, to scorn it to the point of madness. There it was I used to go to look into the dark and see your wolfish eyes pierce me like hooks, your lips smile a deathly smile, to hear your heart pound in your breast—as now—”

“One word more—”

“I used to go alone into the empty shade-paths to long that you might try your assault once more and that I might kill you with one blow, not of a leather whip, oh no! That I might kill you with one thrust of a dagger into your raging heart—”

“If you could do it now—with one blow—”

“I have no desire to do it now. It passed.”

“If you command it, I’ll have myself shot at day-break, but you must hear me out.”

“Whisper lower, they’re looking at us. . . .”

A deep bow.

Loss of sight and breath. He awoke aware that he must dance a new figure. He dreamed for a moment that his body was occupied by a wholly different person. He looked round with clear, calm eyes. He watched the infant flame of quiet happiness in his heart with tender, anxious care.

She did not come near him in the remaining figures. In the last, however, they stood near each other for a moment and she said to him: “There will be a gavotte. Do you dance it?”

“Yes.”

“Do you dance it well?”

“Yes.”

“But do you dance it very well?”

“I think so.”

“Ask me later for that dance.”

“Princess, give me but one moment before I go away, one moment alone with you.”

“Be still.”

The dance ended and a short intermission followed. Raphael walked away to one of the adjoining rooms and concealed himself in the frame of a window. He was as tired as if all his bones were broken. He was indifferent to everything, even to that which had taken place a moment ago. He knew only that these seconds which were passing were the most delightful moments of life. The delight itself he did not feel. He came out of this state only when he saw Mrs. Olovská in a group of persons, both men and women. All were earnestly begging her for something which she steadfastly refused with her silvery laughter. Raphael joined the group and heard that they were asking her to dance the tamburino. She refused most absolutely. This lasted quite a long while. Finally Raphael recalled her instructions. He squeezed carefully through the crowd, bowed before his hostess, and begged that she be good enough to dance the gavotte with him.

“Oh, oh! Some want me to dance the shawl, others the tambourin, and now your worth asks me to dance the gavotte. No, I will find you another partner.”

“Despite a renewed prayer?”

“I cannot, *et tout est dit*.”

Raphael began to persuade, to importune, to beg.

After long hesitation, which seemingly even the prayers of Mr. Olovski could not overcome, she finally agreed to dance the gavotte. The orchestra began to play.

Swaying in space, describing lines and uncertain courses, traces as though it were of enchanted swinging in a land of

dreams, drawing circling curves, amid unexpected bows, those coy refusals full of witching grace, those demure shrinkings which form as if symbolic signs of charming fear and shyness, the dancer came to be like a musical instrument, a harp or a lyre, the creatress of a lofty and beautiful melody. He too had the sensation that he was creating, playing for the first time in his life. Her movements increased in grace with every moment, they grew more and more sure of their beauty, like musical tones which had lain in silence for ages, but which now, torn from their nothingness, showed all their splendour and all the power of beauty. Without hindrance, with perfect impunity, openly, as the rules and the spirit of the dance prescribe, they could now embrace each other with loving smiles, sink in each other's enamoured eyes. Each bow, each flexing of the body, meant, spoke, and did more in the cause of love than a sonnet made of the tongue's most feeling words and of all the longings contained in their form.

Raphael had made scarcely a dozen smooth and elegant steps when, between their first and second approach, he heard the words: "Go through—"

"Madam—"

She ran the length of the salon in a series of beautiful movements and came back. And now, catching the gauze of her skirt with her fingers, she raised it lightly and with gentle rhythm, with noiseless steps, circled past her dancer. Then a whisper: "I am afraid of you—"

"I love you—"

A bow and a whisper.

"Go through—" Then a second whisper: "Through a series of rooms—"

He was now obliged to leave her and return, leave her and return. He listened, listened, listened. She was beside him, but she was silent. Nothing but the hammering blows of his

own heart. She passed him in silence. Then finally, when he expected it least, when in mad despair he was beginning to lose all hope, he again heard words just barely, barely audible between the moveless lips: "Go to your room—"

A few moments later: "From there go down—"

A series of bows and quiet wistful steps to the rhythmic music of the gavotte until again a whisper, a voice soft, yet stirring to the marrow of one's bones: "Down the stairs. . . . Yes at the end of the corridor."

"What then?"

The music is somewhat different. The dance goes on. A smile. Eyes swooning in a languid drowsiness. Between the rosy lips the teeth chatter with fear: "You will find there a half-open door."

She said nothing more to the end of the dance. The orbs of the eyes hid in the shadow of the curling lashes. On the lips a painful smile. The hair, dishevelled in the dance, formed a golden storm about the pale face.

Raphael squeezed into a crowd of men and stood in the doorway leading to an adjoining room. He leaned the back of his head against the slippery mahogany door jamb and looked into the distance with wide-open eyes.

Christopher came up to him and said: "Be ready."

Raphael looked at him askance and smiled good-naturedly. He said quietly in a calm and gentle voice: "I like you very much today."

"What a dancer you are, my dear—"

"You think so?"

"Oh, believe me, you should have long ago joined the ballet in Cracow. You wouldn't have had to wander over highway and by-way!"

"You are malicious, my worthy Cedro. I like a good joke, and it seems there can be no joke without malice. I

am afraid that you will perish this morning. Do you know—you had better go into the next room and write your will, according to the Austrian code. You may, if it pleases you, make me general beneficiary.”

“I shall will you, but not so much—” Cedro replied with an ugly smile. “At most I can bequeath to you the frock-coat which you are wearing and in which you turned such artful pirouettes. The stockings and shoes as well—”

“How ludicrous the man whose intellect is riddled by foul jealousy—”

“Over you—” Cedro whispered with clenched teeth, but Raphael pushed him away with a gentle and kindly movement. At the opposite end of the hall, in an isolated chair, sat his Princess, her head resting against the edge of the marble mantel. They looked at each other with enchanted eyes, for a long, undefinable time. They could not have told how much of it passed, they could not have described what was happening in the world surrounding them or in the depths of their souls. They did not even know of the fact that the passing moments carried on their waves the highest illusion of rapture.

The stillness was disturbed by music and the space between the lovers taken by a young and beautiful girl gracefully dancing a solo number, the shawl. She flitted to and fro through the room, spreading over her head an azure cashmere-shawl. If she stood in the golden path of the mad, delirious glances, they closed their eyelids for one flashing moment, only to gaze on each other, upon opening them, with all the more intoxicating rapture, all the more frightful love.

Finally, before the beauty finished her dance, Raphael raised his head. His eyes had dimmed and grown dark with an inexpressible smile and became like the eyes of the Princess. His lips put on an expression of power and miraculous strength. He became beautiful, splendid, unconquered. With slow step,

with the grace and agility of a tiger, he walked away, seeing neither things nor persons. He passed the indicated corridors, stairs, halls, then again stairs. All were empty and quiet. The distant hum muffled the sound of his footsteps. He pushed the half-open door and entered a boudoir. It was almost dark. In the chimney smouldered a pile of beechwood coals. They were covered already with a film of pearly violet ash. From afar, from beyond distant walls and rooms, came stifled sounds, particularly charming at this removal. Olbromski closed the door behind him and seated himself in front of the fire. He fell into a reverie filled with the fragrance of roses and jasmine. He breathed in sighs which flowed from a mystic spring on the holy mount of bliss.

At some moment a radiant glow flashed on the opposite wall. Elizabeth appeared in the door way and closed it behind her. When he rose from the arm-chair by the fire, she took his place and sat motionless for a while, her hands lying impotently on the arms. He saw before him, in the faint glare of the coal fire, her face, her neck, her arms. He saw her before his soul. When she raised her eyes to him and he plunged once more into the gaze which was broken by his leaving the ball-room, he fell on his knees beside her, clasped her feet with his hands, and released an uncheckable stream of happy tears.

She did not push him away and did not move from her place.

Only after a long, long while, when his heart was calm and the tears had dried on his eyelids, she touched his brow with her hand.

He raised his head.

"I have done all that you wished."

"Yes."

"I bid you farewell—"

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"Farewell, madam."

"I brought you from the album the view of the alley in Grudno. I made it myself, once—in my happy years, in the house of my waking dreams—Take it and keep it on your heart. No cartridge will pierce it."

"Do you not wish me to die today?"

"No."

"Am I never to see you again?"

"I hear in that question—I do not wish to say—I am going."

"Princess!"

"What more?"

"You are the only one I loved in my life! Hear me!"

"What more do you want me to do?"

"I will die this morning if you wish it—I will let myself be caught by the dragoons. The grave will keep the secret—for ever, for ever!"

"Never!"

"You love someone else then?"

"I will not tell!"

"Tell me, in heaven's name!"

"You yourself know best."

"I know nothing."

"You were and are alone. You will be always."

She rose and, pushing him aside, turned to the door through which she had entered. But before she reached it, he called to her in a quiet whisper of mad despair, of blind torment, of invincible love. She stopped at the threshold. She hesitated—then she returned, groaning softly and biting her handkerchief with her teeth. . . .

Some time later they heard in the rooms on the upper floor swift, violent steps and noises. Raphael knew what this meant. They were looking for him. He thought of that

with a smile, without taking his lips from his chalice of happiness, without waking from his swoon. It was all one to him. To die now, to live longer, was not worth one smile. But at her command that he go with Christopher on their expedition he left instantly and went to his room. They were indeed looking everywhere for him. Kalvicki was swearing with all the oaths in creation. Christopher was ready.

"Where were you, lunatic, all this time?" he shouted in the most violent anger.

"How is that? Don't you know? I was—I was at the ball."

"It'll be day in about an hour! We may all perish through your dawdling."

"Nonsense! You won't perish. The Devil does not take the wicked so readily! Who goes to war, my blood-thirsty knight, must have courage in every inch of his soul, in every vein. If you wish, we'll go in the day-time. What do I care?"

"Dress as fast as you can. The most opportune moment has come and he isn't here!"

"For me every moment of the day, or of the night, is equally opportune!"

"You may just and play the fool, but on another occasion!" Kalvicki fumed.

"Woe is me!"

"I have soused the officer with champagne to just the right measure and he lies in the waiting-room like an alder-wood log; the horses are waiting. Eh, I would give it to you if I were your father!"

"Ah well—Heaven guarded—"

"If we don't go in the space of two ayes, there's no sense in starting; I don't go, and the devil take you—I am an old man, I have children and grandchildren."

Raphael was nodding. He was pulling off his gala costume with single, sweeping strokes. Before throwing them off, he



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passed them all, now the jabot, now the sleeve of the coat, over his mouth, caught them with his lips, inhaled their perfume, and kissed them. He drank for the last time the intoxicating fragrance of the touches, the clinging bodily fragrance which had not yet flown away, the warmth of the delightful breaths which had not yet cooled. At length he threw everything into the open valise as into a grave, slammed down the top, and in a few minutes put on the close-fitting riding-costume which lacked only facings to be an artillery uniform. He kept the sheet of paper with the dedicated landscape and put it away as he was instructed. He jammed two double pistols into his belt, slipped in the dagger. He was ready. They put on their fur jackets and their caps and went out by the side door.

The orchestra was still playing, and the palace reverberated with the echo of dancing, the gaiety only now in full swing.

It was getting on toward day-break, but the night still held sway. A light, fleeting snow was sifting down. The frost creaked under their steps.

Kalvicki had disappeared, but he soon came up to the side entrance driving a sleigh harnessed with two horses as spirited as embodied evil, their hoofs clanging over the frozen snow. In accordance with their plan Raphael seated himself on the coachman's box and took the reins. Christopher took his place in the back of the sleigh as a footman. Kalvicki returned to the palace. They waited a few moments. The horses stamped in place and tensed their muscles for flight. Dense vapoury billows rose from their steaming backs. Raphael saw them in the slender beams of light which fell from the crannies in the shutters.

His body was still dreaming; his head still lay on clouds, in a heaven of enraptured delight. Sweet whispers spun without end over his lips and like the threads of a spider's web

enmeshed his sight, his hearing, his touch. His lips were still crushed with eternal kisses, and all his soul was changed into pillars of fragrant smoke.

The door opened. Kalvicki led out, or rather carried out, the officer, already wrapped in a fur coat. He dragged him in his arms to the sleigh, seated him in the principal seat, tucked in his feet very carefully, and shouted: "Go."

Raphael released the horses. They took off in a leap. Kalvicki pointed out the direction of their journey in short orders.

The officer, drunk as an owl, talked in a ceaseless stream: "*Bin doch ganz knall . . . Sacra! Wer bist du eigentlich?*"

"But yes—*ja wohl*—my dear lieutenant!"

"*Sind Sie vielleicht Olovski's Freund?*"

"*Freund?* Certainly! The most absolute! Faster there, slowcoach! Whip up the horses!"

Raphael did so.

"Don't be afraid of anything, my dear lieutenant," Kalvicki shouted into the German's ear; "we have a very good driver, and the footman isn't bad, though he is a numb-skull. We shall get there with pomp and splendour."

"*Frau Olovski ist ja . . . Sind Sie vielleicht ein sogenannnie Kalvicki? Frau Olovski ist aber schön. . . .*"

"Oh, that's understood!"

The horses fell into the hedgerows leading into the village and kicked in great leaps through the deep snow. A vapid dawn began to kindle in the east. The pre-morning wind awoke in the fields.

"Let them go full steam. . . ." Kalvicki was crying in a voice so imperative that Raphael gave in without resistance.

They shot into a row of barns, into a village street. They flew down some beaten path at fullest gallop. Once the plenipotentiary ordered that they turn to the left, into a



bankment was overgrown with osier, while the whole slope to the outmost edge was covered with a carapace of ice which the river had brought there at the time of the flood and deposited on the dense thicket. They now skulked down stream between this icy cover and the ridge like hunted foxes. They were whistling softly, in a manner agreed upon, according to instructions. When they came thus to a point midway between the fire they had left and the next, they heard, just behind the wall, the clatter of a horse's hoofs, running in a gallop. They crouched down. The horse rushed past.

"It's the sentry," Raphael whispered. "He is running to signal the other."

Just below them sounded a thrice-repeated whistle, as of a sea-gull. They parted the osier and saw close by, under the spreading trunk of an old willow bent far out over the water, a small row-boat. A peasant in a sheepskin coat firmly caught a hand of each and pulled them into the boat. He muttered in stern anger: "It's late! The day's crawled out. . . ."

He told them to fall on the bottom, while he himself, sitting on his haunches at the bow, pushed off with such a powerful blow of the oars that the boat swung at once into the current. Then one more whole-armed throw of the oars, then still another. . . . But suddenly, at the edge of the river, cries broke out in several directions. It happened in the twinkling of an eye. The fugitives barely had time to turn their heads when one, a second, a third flash crashed right into their eyes. Bullets began to whistle past them with a long and plaintive whiz.

One of them glanced the water just alongside the board of the skiff. A second gave a quiet, painful sigh. The intrepid ferryman now rose to his feet. The oars gave a tuneful ring in his powerful hands. They saw his huge figure before

them, inclosed from head to food in his great-coat. The boat glided downward, cutting the midstream current in a diagonal line. They were going exceedingly fast. But a new rumble of fire came from the shore they had left and shattered the silence of the night.

Suddenly the guide slumped to his heels in the place where he was standing and coughed in a frightful rasp. The oars fell out of his hands. He rocked for a moment in the astounded eyes of the runaways, now forward, now back, rattling and wheezing, until he fell on the prow of the boat, flapping and splashing in the water with the hanging sleeves of his coat. Given a powerful start, the boat cut the whirls of the main channel and followed the current without oars, already on the other side of the stream. Raphael leaned out and caught one oar. The prostrate peasant filled the whole boat. Awkwardly, snatching the oar from each other, they now neared the icy sheet of the bank, now fell back into the river. The ice strand of this side reached far out into the water and denied approach. In despair Raphael struck it with the oar, but it gave only a dull ringing report, like a death-knell. They sped on in horror and silence, faster, ever faster. . . . The current pulled them toward the middle of the river. Just then they saw a breach in the massive ice-floe. The bottom of the boat was grazing the shallow bed, and so, pushing the rescued oar deep into the bank of submerged sand, they scrambled toward the shore. Dawn was already tinting the rushing water with a murky colouring. One could see the river and the surrounding spaces with increasing clearness. A host of soldiery was gathering on the Galician side. . . . Raphael succeeded in wedging the boat into the sand and in mooring it to such an extent that they could step out into the water. He told Christopher to wade to the shore; he himself lugged the boat by the chain and dragged it out of the water

to the bank, into a harbour between two ice-sheets. They were in the osier when a new volley of balls whistled past them like a nest of wasps, cracking the ice with a sharp tinkle and scattering it in all directions. They lifted the man in feverish haste. They turned him face upward. Their eyes were confronted with the sight of a brown face from whose wide-open mouth poured a dark stream of blood. The eyes, already glazed with the white film of death, looked at them with a look from the other world. At sight of the wordless speech of pain in this face, grown stark in life, in strength, in strenuous toil, Christopher staggered and his legs sank under him. His knees cut deep into the snow. Wringing his hands with an expression of bottomless despair, a hundred times greater than when he was saying farewell to his father, he looked and looked at the prostrate corpse. Suddenly his whole body trembled and he began to weep like a child. His head fell at the feet of the killed man, his convulsive hands clasped the wet, miry boots. He began to whine and complain in consuming torment.

"It is I. . . . This is my fault. . . . It is I who have killed you! Just because I wished to go to war, you are lying here! My God, my God, what shall I do now? What shall I do now, unfortunate one? O Lord of boundless mercy!"

He raised a pair of insane, stony eyes to Raphael and asked him in a dazed whine: "What shall we do now? Have pity upon me! What shall I do with him?"

"Do you know," replied Raphael, pulling off his sodden boots, "you are most uncommonly suited to the military profession. You have chosen a very proper calling for yourself, very! If you will sing such moving dirges over the body of every fallen soldier, you will turn out to be the most valiant officer in the army. They will present you to General Napoleon, as the soldier of soldiers, for a suitable reward."

Christopher was listening attentively. He watched Raphael with gaping eyes as the latter tore his shirt into strips, wrapped his feet in the dry cloths, and finally drew his boots on again.

"What shall we do?" he whispered, more and more quietly.

"In the first place, pull off your boots, tear off a piece of your shirt, and bind your feet."

Cedro complied as fast as he could, sitting behind the levee, as if this course were indeed the answer to his despairing query. When both were reshod Raphael told him to pull the boat still farther ashore while he wound its chain round a willow-trunk. He then took off his cap, turned with his face to the body and prayed silently for a second.

The day was rising. They came out of the riverside thicket and with wide step clambered to the crest of the valley. But as soon as they appeared there, whirring and hooting once more, a volley of bullets rushed past them and the sound of shots rang out. Raphael burst out laughing. Christopher looked at him with eyes still powerless and brimming with tears.

"Germans!" Olbromski shouted, cupping his hands round his lips. "Austrians! Scoundrels! Shoot, all of you, but shoot accurately! Aim for an hour, you may hit once in a lifetime! Hanging people on the scaffold, that you do readily and ably, warriors that you are! Aim! Louts and fumble-fists!"

Six or seven bullets whizzed past. The two men climbed to a white sandy hillock. There Raphael spread his legs and shouted: "Long live the Emperor! I'll come back to you, you scurvy dogs!"

He walked forward with jaunty stride, whistling at the top of his voice. At some moment he turned to Christopher.

"Are you still snivelling?"

"Listen here, leave me alone. . . ."

"If you want to slobber, walk by yourself, or people will think that I am pulling you into the army by your ears."

Christopher was now quiet for a long time. He walked with the same step as his mentor. They passed the littoral plain in silence and began to ascend the little hillocks which marked the valley of the Vistula in a long rampart.

"Christy," Raphael said quickly in a merry voice, "do you know, my brother, that we have already been in a battle? Do you hear, my friend? Bullets whistled round our ears as though we were the most veritable soldiers. Did you hear them whistle?"

"I did."

"But don't sleep now, and answer me soberly!"

"I've told you once already to leave me alone."

"Very well, my tender Galician, I am leaving you alone. But where the deuce is that shanty? Kalvicki told us to go there. He said that it was on a hillock. Let's go up higher."

They climbed to the highest sand-hill, just barely sprinkled with frost and snow. The black, frozen sand gave under their feet. They looked round. In the distance, beyond the Vistula, in a thicket of brown shrubbery, the palace in Yaz was emerging from the bluish mists of the rising morn. Its dark shingle roof threw a brutal splash on the clear azure of the sky. Raphael stopped, turned motionless. He looked at the distant scene with a sullen gaze. As he stood there, cold and speechless, it seemed to him that he was living in a moment so far from his life that it might be a moment of his childhood. Does that which the eyes are beholding exist? What was it that occupied him yesterday, last night? He felt within him a lack, a void, a dark formless dungeon. Does that lofty house really exist? Did the happiness of which that visible form is the expression, really take place in space and time? The rosy beams of dawn painted with delightful tints that distant, bluish stretch. The river gleamed, rushing swiftly through brilliants of ice. He turned sharply from this sight

and walked up to the dwelling which stood close by. The nondescript building, a fishermen's hut or a refuge house for flood victims, stood stark and gaunt on a naked hillock. To the remnant of a tavern wall, or some shelter place for flooded poverty, the present occupant had added a mud hut of wicker and river slime, of pieces of timber, of bits of boards, of rafters, of logs retrieved from the river. Over half of this structure hung a once tall and pointed roof, now rotten and sunk, drooping like a tattered rag. The low door was covered with a thick matting of straw; the walls were padded with moss and dung. A tiny window, made of one pane, had blown for itself, like the warm lips of a child, a deep funnel in the drift which had snowed it in. Slender columns of smoke were already pushing through the black, slippery shingles.

They knocked on the door with their fists. It was opened after a long while, by a scrawny, black, dishevelled crone. Behind her appeared heads of children, with faces as if of cuckoos and hobbies.

Raphael opened the entire door, and despite the noisome steam which enveloped them, he stepped inside. He looked about him in the dark and smiled savagely. The memory of Baska and of that night. . . .

"Your man ferries across the river?" he turned to the woman.

"I don't know if he ferries or no," she muttered back unwillingly.

"Well, he brought us over, so we know that."

"I don't know what people say. My man is a fisherman. How should I know if he ferries or not? Soldiers are there now, shooting with guns. I don't know anything."

"Well, we had some business with him."

"He'll come around midday. I don't know."



"He told us to tell you, mother," said Raphael, sullenly counting the children with his eyes, "that—that he won't be coming till supper. He won't be coming now. Do you understand?"

"Do I understand?"

"There! And what was owing to him from us for the crossing and for the wine which he was smuggling, that he told us to give you in hand. Here. . . ."

He took a fistful of money from his pocket, counted out a few ducats, and put them into her hand.

"Hold it there in your fist, woman, for it's no copper, but pure gold," he shouted at her.

He shook himself and made hastily for the door.

He was outdoors already, but returned to ask about the nearest manor-house or village where he could hire a wagon. Just then he saw Christopher, who, having seized a small knife which lay on the table, was ripping the edge of his coat and scooping out the gold sewed in inside the lining.

"What are you doing, fool, what are you doing?" he growled at him. "What will you buy your horse with, your uniform, hire an orderly?"

The other did not answer. He ripped the lining with the knife round all the edges and placed every ducat he found on the table. The woman looked at the performance with wide-open mouth, holding her head indifferently now over the right, now over the left shoulder. Finally, when Christopher had emptied his pockets of everything, even to the dagger and pistol, Raphael caught him by the hand.

"I am asking you, what are you thinking of doing?"

Christopher made no reply. His whole body shook from time to time with an inward tumult; his jaws were set, his eyes veiled with his lids.

"Pick up that money and put it in your pockets, do you

hear?" Raphael commanded in a whisper. "Give her five ducats and she'll be rich. Do you hear? I command you!"

He jerked him by the arm. To his amazement Christopher pushed him away with a movement and a gesture so unexpected and looked at him with such an expression that Raphael yielded quite humbly. They left the cottage.

They walked in silence over the snow, making their way from the knoll, frozen and snow-strewn once more, toward the village which was visible at some distance. The sun was rising over the woods, over the humped and pitted land, and folding the bluish tents which the night had pitched in the valley.

34. On the Way

UNNOTICED by anyone, stealing through the thickets of juniper, they made their way to the village. Its gaily smoking chimneys cut the rosy atmosphere with nebulous blue streamers. Raphael outdistanced his companion and entered the first dwelling he came upon with the question whether he couldn't hire a team of horses to Myslovice.

When Christopher came up, he was asked into the cottage in already very friendly fashion. The spacious dwelling, surrounded with a fence from the side of the field and curtained from the road by a small fruit-orchard, bathed in the morning sun. The trees were covered with snow from root to highest branch and created the illusion that they had a triple number of those white and tangled branches. The house was built of brick, with a shingle roof. A fire blazed in the chimney of the large room and seemed to invite one in through the half-open door. A sturdy farmer was conversing quietly with Raphael, who remained standing on the threshold.

"To Myslovice, in one lap, without stopping for the night? That's a mighty stretch of road! Right on the Polish border—"

"Pshaw, if the horses are good, they will cover the distance with a light little sleigh like a swallow!" Raphael argued.

"My horses are not of the worst, and I have the sleigh, but it's a holiday."

"You know, my friend, that making holiday is a good thing, but a little money means something too."

"And how much will you give?"

"We'll give you thirty guldens."



"And you'll give a *Trinkgeld*?"

"We will."

"If you lay it down, not in paper, but in hard coin, if you give your word on the *Trinkgeld*—"

"We'll give you every penny in nothing but Netherlandish thalers."

"Well then—come in, come in."

They entered the spacious room and greeted the housewife, who was bustling about the chimney. The husbandman was a young man, gay and, it seemed, far from a fool. He sent sidelong glances in the direction of his guests, but did not ask who they were or whence they came. From a painted cupboard he brought out some sweet whisky in a coloured carafe, a handsome loaf of black bread, butter, some holiday pastry, a loaf of Silesian cheese. From the shed he brought a jug of smuggled wine. He was puffing briskly on his clay-pipe, bowing and inviting his guests to eat.

"Do not scorn what we have; eat, as if for your money."

Raphael did not refuse and ate heartily. Christopher drank a few glasses of whisky and chewed in silence on a piece of bread and salt.

"How are your Germans, are they behaving well?" Raphael threw the question when the husbandman returned from the stables, to dress for the journey.

"The Germans? Our Germans? Well, Germans are Germans."

"They say that now anyone walks here that wants to; you have Germans, you have French. Whatever one likes—"

"One comes across all sorts. Whatever one likes. It's droll, the way you put that."

"And who the deuce rules this Silesia of yours now?"

The host looked round slyly, puffed a few times at his pipe, and said merrily: "Who would know! He rules who

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wants to, and so cleverly that you would think no one was here."

"Have you heard anything of a battle?"

"Why not? They're chasing each other from place to place."

"Who is chasing whom?"

"It's hard to know. But we have a suspicion that our German is loath to stay in the country. He prefers it in the city. But he makes most willingly of all for the places where there is a garrison and a *Festung*."

"Well, well!"

"I was in church yesterday. We come out after high mass; we listen and there is an uproar, they're shooting so outside the city that the window-panes ring in the church. Who? What? People are running and telling that the gentry from Poland is fighting with the men from the Kingdom."

"And what was it?"

"People ran into the street to look, but you couldn't see much any more. The armies pushed each other out into the fields. Only the smoke trailed behind them all the way to the river. Toward evening a townsman was telling us that he heard that the Prussians beat the Poles, but that right after that they ran away themselves."

"Such battles are a pleasure!"

"He he—so they are."

A pair of well-knit chestnuts was soon harnessed to a light, unshod sleigh, the seat was spread with a woollen rug, and the two friends found themselves on their way. The driver lashed the animals and reached the forest in almost a gallop. He waited until they were well in the thick of it, then slowed down somewhat, and, turning half-way about, said to his passengers: "I suppose that you would rather not meet any Germans—"



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"Oh, it's all one to us," Raphael answered hypocritically, "but it's always better not to meet anyone."

"Well, I don't care to see them either. We'll go through the woods."

The narrow little trail, covered with powdery snow still untouched by either hoof or runner, threaded its way through a dense and changeless forest. They were riding several hours, and it was well on toward noon, when the driver informed them that they would soon see the high-road and that there was a hostelry by that road where it would be well to let the horses breathe a spell and to take some refreshment themselves. True enough, the woods began to thin and the tavern-house came into view. Still in the forest and cautious as a fox, the Silesian made a circle round the inn and, before riding up to it, peered into the highway and threw his keen eyes about for a long time in both directions. There was no one in front of the tavern or on the road. A flock of sparrows was busily scratching in a litter of hay and remnants of fodder in front of the gate. Without letting the whip out of his hand the driver entered the door of the tavern and scanned its interior. When he had finally satisfied himself that all was well, he brought the sleigh to the door. Entering the tavern, the travellers beheld a curl-bedecked Jew huddled behind the counter in a setting of kegs and barrels and so deeply engrossed in meditation that he scarcely saw his guests. His dreamy eyes rested on the figures of the young men, on their faces and clothing, with a look of ill will and as if of aversion. They asked for whisky. He brought it with attentive obsequiousness and, preserving his silence, gave them what they ordered. They ate bread and cheese and meat from the stores of their driver. Cedro was ill-tempered and surly. In answer to Raphael's solicitous questions he replied that he was unwell. Now, after drinking several more glasses of whisky,

he hung his head, covered his face with his hands, leaned his whole body on the table, and dozed or pretended that he was sleeping. Olbromski stretched out on a long bench under the wall and stared vacantly at the ceiling. The little Jew, in a slow, melancholy step, not wishing, apparently, to obtrude his presence on the gentlemen, slipped out of the room. A little later he still more quietly returned. The horses, led in under the roof, into the stable, which formed a sort of ante-room to the tavern, snorted as they crunched their fodder.

This quiet rest had lasted quite a while when suddenly the two halves of the stable door slammed to with a violent clatter. At the same moment, the driver, pale as death, threw open the door of the room and shouted: "*Jägers!*"

Raphael jumped to his feet and for a moment stood wholly motionless, not knowing what to do. The Silesian thundered at him as at a servant: "Barricade the door!"

The two fell into the barn and began to prop the entrance gate as well as a side door with wheels, poles, ladders, mangers, part of the body of a wagon, whatever came to hand. From the outside there now came the sound of merry talk, the clang of arms, and the clatter of horseshoes over the hard, smooth clay of the yard. Before long someone pushed at the door. Then came a clamorous knocking, cries, orders. The driver bounded into the room and began to look for the Jew. The tavern-keeper was sitting calmly in the shade of his barrels. His eyes shone like a cat's.

"Do you have arms?"

"I—arms?"

"Bring what you have—cartridges! Quick!"

"Where would I get cartridges?"

Without ceremony the farmer seized him by the throat and shook him once, twice, a third time. The Israelite, as soon as he caught his breath, turned his eyes and indicated a plank in

one of the corners. They raised the joist with difficulty and got out a loaded gun and a rusty freak of a sabre. In the mean while the pounding had grown in vehemence; the soldiers battered the door with their swords and stormed it like a fortress gate. A Prussian fist hit the frozen window and knocked out the panes. A cloud of white steam rushed into the frosty air. The huge gloved paw slipped in through the jagged aperture and was just about to take hold of the frame when, gathering all his strength, the lurking Silesian struck at the sleeve with the singular old sword. Noise and hubbub broke out in the yard. A number of rifles pushed their barrels into the opening, and pillars of smoke burst out simultaneously in all directions. Christopher was still sitting in his place, owl-like and inactive. Raphael thrust a pistol into his right hand and a sword into his left and placed him at the side under the window. He told the peasant to guard the door with a shaft torn from the stamping-trough while he himself seized the Jew by the head and, dragging him along, shouted at him to show him the way to the loft.

He clambered up the steps of the ladder in the twinkling of an eye and stood in the door of the projection through which hay was put into the loft over the stable. He tilted the hanging door and looked down. He counted the green *jägers* with his eyes. There were seven of them belonging to the border patrol. Three were still on horseback, four were now ramming the gates, now running to the windows of the structure. When Raphael looked out, the three who had remained on horseback were dressing the hand of their wounded comrade. This lasted a few moments. They then took the carbines off their backs, poured powder on the pans, and were about to fire again into the broken window. They cocked their guns. Raphael aimed at the group and fired. The shots rang out simultaneously and went into the woods like a

peal of thunder. One of the soldiers fell to the ground. The three on horse leaped toward him. The others, with drawn swords, rushed for the window. Raphael aimed once more into the group and fired. A new groan. They threw themselves manfully at the open window. There Cedro, but a step removed, seeing them before him, fired right into their faces. Raphael, having done his work in the loft, ran to his aid. He had the Jew by his side-curls and was dragging him along for fear that he might betray him. At the window the Silesian was swinging his beam in a devastating circle and sent two *jägers* sprawling into the middle of the road. Unexpectedly Cedro jumped into the yawning window, and his body was half-way outside when Olbromski caught him with a cry: "What are you doing?"

"Let me go! What the devil, I want to die!"

He pulled himself forward violently and fired a random shot, the last which they had, at the group of soldiers. Raphael and the driver pulled him out of the window by main force and shoved him into the middle of the room. The Jew, under threat of death, was loading the gun, while Raphael, sword in hand, stood guard at the window and the Silesian prepared his battering-ram for a blow.

Suddenly all grew still outside. Looking out stealthily through a crack in the door, they saw with relief that the *jägers* were mounting and pulling up their wounded or dead. Before leaving they loaded their arms once more and, already on horseback, gave five shots at the tavern, aiming at the windows, the door, and the gate. They then set off at a gallop in the direction of Tarnovica. Following the advice of the Silesian, Raphael and Cedro slipped out of the tavern on foot as soon as the horses were hitched to the sleigh.

They waded, for a while, through the snows, avoiding the highway, lest they meet another patrolling division. But the

roads here were unfamiliar to the driver. They soon returned to the high-road, therefore, and, looking attentively before and behind them, set off as fast as the horses would go. The forest trees flashed by like a solid screen. The man pulled his cap over his ears and whistled merrily, urging his horses on. Once he turned and said with a gay inflection: "We've beaten the Prussians and now we're making off as fast as the horses can draw breath."

"The Lord will repay you, brother. If it hadn't been for you, we'd have gone to rot in a dungeon or to feed the ravens from a gibbet."

"Where now— If only that Jew won't give me away, this wouldn't be anything worrisome."

"How will you go back, brother?"

"I'll go back through the woods, but that Jew— He has ugly eyes, the pagan, ugh! One will have to ask him not to bark."

"You will ask him?"

"I'll ask him, never fear; he won't say boo."

"Ah well, do what you like—" Raphael muttered ungraciously.

Christopher, just as early in the day, was silent and morose. Owing apparently to the whisky which he had drunk in the tavern, he dozed in the sleigh and rocked from side to side. He was mumbling constantly through his sleep and shifting uneasily. When he opened his eyes, he passed them over the forest in amazement, and his face had an expression of painful joy, of almost childish delight.

It was evening when they drove into Myslovice.

They were safe now, as a division of French *chasseurs* was encamped in the town. They had no sooner entered than their eyes beheld them—soldiers in green uniforms, in wide, rakish caps, with huge red noses and moustaches worthy of the



name. Christopher, who spoke French incomparably better than Raphael, now became the principal figure. The Silesian, paid munificently, much over the agreed price, and taken leave of in brotherly fashion, set off merrily and vanished in a by-way. The travellers proceeded to the manor-house, where the military governor of the town had his quarters. This commandant, a hearty tippler it would seem, and a rowdy, at first began to examine the two in a most spleeny and distrustful fashion, but softened presently. He not only gave them a pass to Chensstohova, but of his own initiative secured them a tiny room for their night's lodging.

Just before sundown they went out to look over the country-side. Standing on a rise, they saw before them a far-flung wooded plain, divided by a ridge of hillocks, which vanished in the grey, hazy distance. The sun was going down and its horizontal shafts painted that vast smooth field of juniper with red and golden light. The two youths looked thoughtfully at this land, which they saw for the first time and which they were about to cross with bloody step. Dull, tangled presentiments played in each of them like the illusive voice of a conch, to which one vainly strains one's ear.

At dusk they visited the farrieries which the Germans had recently established, and returned quietly to their little room.

The next day, as soon as day broke, they hired a coach and set off for Sieviesh. Arriving in this town, they followed the instructions of the military governor of Myslovicze and asked for the house of the commandant of the city, Captain Yarymski. The name was not unfamiliar to Raphael. A hidden hope told him that the governor would prove to be none other than his class-mate from the lyceum. At the lodging of that dignitary they were told that they could not see the captain until some hour of the afternoon, as he was sleeping just then. Willy-nilly they went into the city. They visited

the old castle of the bishops of Cracow, now crumbling into rubble. Near the ruins they heard a medley of military noises and, climbing to a small eminence, saw a detachment of cavalry going through a drill. They hastened there with all possible speed. Christopher became animated only now. It was a division of volunteers with a lieutenant at the head, an incomplete detachment composed of only common soldiers. Fifty farm-hands were mounted on very presentable horses. They had short, navy-blue jackets and breeches of the same colour, faced with red, the colours of the province of Cracow, caps covered with black broadcloth and adorned with black hair aigrettes several inches in height. Some wore grey breeches, and several, instead of uniforms, were clad in homespun smocks. Some were provided with swords and pistols, small carbines and cartridge boxes; others, who were being drilled in a separate group, only with wooden pikes, twelve feet in length, and tipped with spears and darts. This was not a prepossessing army; its field appearance was still awkward and unimpressive, but the two observers trembled with emotion at sight of it. Knotty fists gripped the wooden spearshafts with a lusty vim and jauntily swung sabres of the most varied origin and size.

Noon was approaching. The would-be soldiers recalled the time of their prospective call on the military governor and turned back toward the city. They had to wait quite a while on the porch; they were then admitted into the front room, and here again they waited about an hour. At length the veteran on duty told them that the captain was having his coffee already and that he would be with them any minute. The door opened finally and there entered with stern and dignified mien, in a uniform gleaming with bullion and braid, Raphael's old class-mate—Yarymski.

Seeing before him a friend so long unseen and so changed, Raphael could not utter a word and did not know what attitude to assume. Yarymski, it seemed, felt the same, as he did not speak at once. However, he collected himself somehow and, walking up to Christopher with a frowning brow, asked: "Your name, sir?"

"Cedro."

"And yours is Olbromski, I know. We know each other from school, of course. And what do you wish of me?"

They handed him their passes and explained respectfully that they are on their way to Chenstohova to enlist in the army. The captain was smoothing his moustache and listening with a little smile, looking askance from time to time at his school-mate.

When they had told him everything, he pondered for a moment; then he said: "By why necessarily to Chenstohova?"

"We were advised to go there."

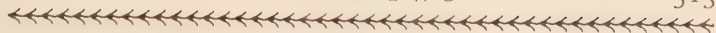
"You were advised—ha! You could find room here, you know. For we're all going to start for Lovich. We have plenty here of what His Highness the Emperor calls '*la pospolité*.' It's drilling out rather well."

"We should like to get into the artillery," Cedro put in.

"The artillery, ah well, that's another thing. I warn you, however, that to entertain such plans, one must have money. For a soldier's uniform, and that of the simplest, one must have seventy-three guldens, not counting the linen and accessories. What, then, of an officer!"

"My friend is a man of means."

"That, of course, alters the case. I beg your pardon, I didn't know. I shall have your passes given you at once. Yes, there are six hundred Poles in Chenstohova, who seized it and now comprise the garrison. However, I would advise



topher's announcement threw him into a blazing inward fury. Unpleasant feelings surged up within him at this meeting. Something cadaverous and ghastly was coming out, as if from the ground. . . .



35. To the Sea!

IT came about that Cedro and Olbromski did not, after all, reach Chenstohova and their longed-for artillery. Christopher did not have a penny, as he had left all his money in the fisherman's cottage. The funds, also his, sewed in the coat of Raphael, after careful calculation, were found insufficient to cover the cost of artillery equipment for both. Yarymski, for that matter, put his hand into the situation and by gifts of persuasion peculiar to him prevailed upon Raphael to stay in Sieviesh. To outward view it seemed that the two young men themselves spoiled their plan by stopping too long on their way. The time flew on wings, and one day of delay decided everything. Two days after the holidays already that portion of the *pospolité* which was mustering in Sieviesh left the district of Cracow and started for Lovich, the place of meeting. Of sheer necessity and, moreover, under the stress of the persuasion of the entire body of officers, they entered the Cracovian cavalry as common knights. Yarymski sold them two saddle-horses from his own stable, allegedly of such exceeding worth that their price swallowed up almost all the doubloons scooped from the seams of Raphael's riding-coat. He arranged also some sort of succession by virtue of the goodwill of a certain neighbour who preferred to stay at home and who likewise agreed, for a small consideration, to leave the so-called "uniforms" on the backs of the two farm-hands whom he sent into the ranks. In this way the volunteers stepped into the two vacated places.

The tiny army of Sieviesh, composed entirely of cavalry, started out in good form and fettle for Chenstohova and Lovich.

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Towards evening of the 31st of December they entered the low flood-plain of the Bzura River. Far off, almost two leagues away, they saw the collegiate towers of Lovich. Having crossed the river, the Cracovian regiment entered the city, but the squares round the old town hall where the general staff was housed were so packed with soldiery that the warriors, highly disconcerted, had to withdraw and seek shelter away off in the suburbs. Having housed their horses in the stables which were pointed out to them and attended to them as best they could, the frozen soldiers threw themselves into the arms of sleep.

They stayed in Lovich about three weeks. The matter at issue was the formation of the various corps and even the command of the entire army. General Dombrovski, indeed, had the title of commander-in-chief, but it was whispered on all sides that the commandership would fall in the end to Prince Joseph Poniatovski, who had finally decided upon espousing Napoleon and his cause.

Lovich was all transformed into a military camp. What ceremony there was about observing the watchword, the mysterious *mot d'ordre* and *mot de ralliement*! The civilian population which did not have the right to know the password or the countersign, walked purposely where the guard stood and where access was forbidden. The sole object was to hear the stern and thundering question of the sentry, whether it was necessary to ask or not: "Who goes there?" and to answer loudly: "A friend, a Pole!"

General Dombrovski did not delay, but early in January left for Warsaw, where the Emperor Napoleon himself had already arrived. On the 18th of January came an order that all the forces in Lovich start out. The regiments received the command with joy.

"Along the river! With the Vistula! At the German!"



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suffered woefully with cold. The rider is warmed by his brother the horse when the driving rain beats them both and the wind flays them over the hips. Nothing warms the foot-soldier. They stopped for the night wherever fate willed. At times in the vicinity of a manor-house or village, at times in the open field. The army was thankful when a forest or a wood was near. If a village was not far, the cavalry soon took the barns, sheds, and stables for their way-worn horses. There the orderlies unsaddled them so that they would not get sore, and fed them what came to hand. Woe then to the thatch, not only of peasant huts, but even of magisterial halls and proud city-dwellings. Not infrequently a sizable manor-house roof came to earth like a thunder-clap and transformed itself into a dozen or more stalls on the ground.

Christopher Cedro, the coddled candidate for diplomat, soon learned to esteem the honest Mazovian pine as a priceless treasure. As soon as the camping-ground was chosen and posts assigned to the various squadrons, Raphael and he came together as of old, cut the most spreading pine-trees they could find, drove them into the ground one next to the other, and made a serried wall against the wind. They tied the tops into a sort of cupola. In cases where peasant or even—oh, horror!—manorial thatch was near, they topped the branches with a thick mat of straw, torn from the roof in ruthless fashion. On the floor of this wigwam, whose open side was always turned toward the bonfire, they knowingly placed branches and fan-shaped fronds of fir, at first large, then smaller and smaller, until they formed a high and elastic feather-bed, almost touching the cupola. Then the men threw themselves upon it in groups of five or six, certain that it would buoy them up like springs and that it would surely save them from contact with the clinging Mazovian mud. When in addition to this they leaned one against another,

back to back, and covered themselves snugly with saddle-blankets, they slept like logs. The long morning sleep of gay cavaliers was unthought-of on frosty days. They awoke in the morning merry, brisk, and hearty, as though from a bed of eider-down. But on days when it rained and blew, they crawled out from under the sodden straw and from between the dripping branches in humours that were far from downy.

In the last days of January an angry and powerful rumbling, a dull, deafening thunder travelling through the depths of the earth, woke them at sullen and overcast dawnings. They listened to it in awe and amazement. It seemed to their sleepy ears that it was the dread, self-striking stick of fairy lore, the dire self-falling hammer which shook the ground in such fashion. It went down the field, down the wood, that distant blare. It came with the winds and the rains, the snows and nocturnal mists.

"Do you hear, old horses," the senior sergeant, Yacek Gaykos, who had crossed the length and breadth of the earth, would mutter at times, "do you hear that stamp, stamp, stamp?"

"We hear, we hear, sergeant! And who can it be stamping so?"

"Eh? Don't you know even that! It's his Worship the Emperor a-stamping so. He's angry!"

"Angry?"

"Do you hear all of you how he beats the ground with his foot? One, two; one, two! Not as he told them, not as they should have, have the marshals done, it seems! They are running up to him now on their fleet horses, hat in hand, their calves a-shivering under them, and one jabbars afore another that he isn't to blame. . . ."

"And where may he be now, the Emperor, sergeant?"

"The Lord only knows where he is. Listen where the voice

comes from—there is the Emperor. One hundred guns are firing. Do you hear? Here are we by the river, the Vistula, and there you see the Bug, there the Narev flowing. Where didn't he go—my Lord! Wilds, forests, along the lakes, away, way off, to the north! The Brandenburgian traitor has already settled there for good, planted his potatoes, lighted his pipe, and you on your own land, take off your cap to him! For it did come to that. 'I will stay here,' says he, 'for ever, I will drive you out, I will bring my little fellows on your land and give your land to them. And you get you out of here, take yourself off!' This is *mein Vaterland*,' says he, 'my rule and command. Your land is now my land.' He went and took Warsaw, he went and took Chensztowa, went all the way to Cracow, but what of that? Now one would think you'd lost your pantaloons, the way you're running! Where is your land now? Show it to us! You haven't your Berlin, you haven't a scrap of land, thief of another's goods! The best you can do is to turn a somersault into the deep sea. Now you know how it feels to be driven from your hearth and home!"

"I dare say the German will yet pull himself together."

"Nothing will help him, if he had ten times his number, for the Emperor himself is coming!"

"And how far will His Highness the Emperor go?"

"Don't dare to ask that! Don't you dare! Only the Almighty Himself knows that. To him alone of men He tells what laws to make on this earth. And you dare not ask!"

Cedro listened to these tales with a stern and serious face. He thought of Oyrynski, surnamed the Little Sword. Does he also hear, does he hear the great Emperor angrily stamping his foot over the lands of Mazuria?

Although he had an orderly, Christopher attended his horse himself. He left only the currying and feeding to the

of Prussian prisoners taken at Jena, Auerstädt, and Prenzlau. Raphael proceeded with his regiment a league beyond the Vistula. Here he found John Henry Dombrowski no longer the commander-in-chief of the Polish military forces, but merely the general of a division and commander of the first legion. The legion consisted of one company of artillery, four regiments of foot, and the cavalry of the *pospolité*. There was constant talk of reorganizing the cavalry so that each regiment would consist of three squadrons. They were waiting only for the order of the governing committee and of the minister of war, which was to come any moment.

Bydgoszcz seethed with feverish, almost passionate excitement. Arms, leather, were still being bought, saddles and cartridge-boxes were being sewed. The tailors had no end of work; soldiers stood at the saddler's elbow night and day. One by one, newly-formed divisions still continued to come. In the cavalry, soldiers were being advanced swiftly and easily to the rank of under officer or even of subaltern, provided only the "subject" had passable ability. This one and that had scarcely had time to look round when they received the right to order officerial insignia at the lace-maker's and could attach the shoulder-strap and the two silk stripes of second lieutenant to their right shoulders. Newly-uniformed lieutenants gleamed with stripes of navy-blue silk on a band running down the entire length of the sleeve, new majors proudly raised shoulders weighted down with epaulets, whose bullion filled the privates with fear, while the "cross" band on the colonel's hat shamed even the gold of the cord.

Early in February already General Dombrowski led out his forces, at first under the command of Bernadotte, Prince of Ponte Corvo, later of General Lefebvre-Desnouettes, operating on the right bank of the Vistula. Word passed through the legion: "To Danzig!" Marching, at rest, in the night,

the senior soldiers taught their men what it was—this Danzig. They scattered everywhere the edict of General Dombrowski, the main points of which proclaimed:

“Hollanders, Germans, and people of whatsoever religion or nationality living on Polish soil who will comport themselves peacefully in their homes and will have no dealings with the enemies of the nation, who will remain loyal to the Polish Government and will pay the assessed contributions and taxes, will be allowed entire freedom in the exercise of their religion, protected in their persons and property, and regarded as brothers and compatriots. You, on the other hand, who are Poles,” the manifesto read, “who profess the Catholic faith, remember that the strangers settled in your land have by common duty to the country become your brothers; remember that the Evangel tells us to live as brothers; leave to each man the freedom given of God, to worship Him according to his belief and, without examining into the differences of faith, be united by citizenship with all inhabitants who enrich your land by their trade and industry. . . .”

A S H E S



PART THREE

36. The Route of the Emperor

THE division of General Zayonchek, or the so-called northern legion, was divided into three brigades. The first of these, under the command of General Fiszer, consisted of a regiment of foot, borrowed from the third division of the first regiment of Cracovian cavalry, and four six-pound cannon.

Christopher Cedro did not leave his squad. After the re-organization he found himself in the second brigade, under General Krasinski.

As soon as the army was quartered in huts, outbuildings—anywhere under roof—and shelter was found for the horses in stables and barns, the enemy began his light-cavalry attacks and the Poles answered with irregular assaults. Christopher Cedro found himself in Kot in the early part of March. Here Gaykos fitted out a good place for the horse, and a fair bed of boards and straw in an alcove of a peasant hut for Cedro. At first everything went on in the old way: muster, exercises, military drill. But at the expiration of only two weeks things began to grow anxious. The hostile cavalry fell into the village at night, in the morning, toward evening, at noon, and at breakfast-time; it sped through the streets with noise and whistling and vanished in the grey winter drizzle. Gaykos was particularly fond of these encounters with the enemy.

On the 25th of March, at twilight, there occurred one such attack. At least four hundred of the enemy's horsemen fell into the village and sought to set fire to it at all four corners. Lieutenant-Colonel Skalski had the trumpeter sound a violent call "to horse," and in a twinkling of an eye the post threw itself full force upon the assailants. The attack

was repulsed as speedily as it was begun. Christopher rushed on with the rest in the murk of the descending night; he even saw before him a heavily bearded rider, but despite his horse's utmost effort he could not overtake him. All the defensive force collected, the officers decided to make an immediate sally at the enemy. Word passed through the ranks that whoever wished to join the excursion as a volunteer should report to the regiment of Dombrovski. Gaykos and Cedro volunteered together. They marched divided into parties, in the dead of night, over the fields, in a wholly unfamiliar direction. In the distance, under a wooded rise, they finally saw fires. They surrounded them in a radius of several versts, over marshy, tangled ground. They fell upon them from the side, from the north. They rode in dead silence until the decisive moment. Christopher could not understand the least thing of all this expedition. He was deeply astonished when Lieutenant Vyhliniski suddenly spurred his horse and rushed forward with such uproar, brandishing of sword, and strong words of command, as though he were beset by a mad dog. The rest followed suit instantly, without knowing what it was all about. The volunteer cavalry rushed forward with tilted lances and fell between the smouldering fires upon the sleeping men, who tore themselves from the ground and mounted their horses amid cries, curses, and shots. However, victory over that drowsy throng did not come with ease. They rushed out of the darkness formed into flying detachments. The hostile forces joined with pikes and lances; wet horses and black men fell upon each other in the pitchy darkness. Here and there, amid the fires, riders chased each other in the light, unhorsing their opponents amid wild and raucous cries. In the course of the skirmish dawn came. In the bluish winter twilight sounded a sudden clang and clash of lances; the deathly cries, the groaning of horses, and the

clatter of their leaps over the iron sod rose sharper and clearer. The assailant became master of the camp, of some odd score horses, four dead and seven wounded prisoners. The others, breaking off and shooting, withdrew from the field and disappeared behind the forest.

A week later, in accordance with the plan worked out by General Fiszer, an attack was made on the enemy's winter quarters. Colonel Godebski routed the dangers which threatened the advancing horsemen from the sides and worried the enemy with a vexatious letting-out and withdrawing of his cavalry. As soon as the adversary rushed forward in hot pursuit, Godebski tried to surround him with his infantry. Captains Kryzewski and Krechmer made their way through the woods as far as Burdingen, and, the Polish cavalry having decoyed the enemy and, fleeing purposely, induced him to venture too far, they unfurled their line and pitched into battle with their bayonets. The onslaught was strong and bold, from three sides. Cedro now saw the enemy by daylight for the first time. He tore on in line with pointed lance and was one of the first to fall into the narrow village street. Lieutenant-Colonel Skalski saw the Cracovians as they rushed into the fire, and the sharpshooters as they plunged headlong, with tilted lances, straight under the hoofs of the enemy's horses. As a result, they soon met with great honour: they were designated for the selected companies which General Isidor Krasinski was just then forming of the Cracovian horse and foot. Cedro received crimson, silver-edged shoulder-straps and an increase in his wages of a penny a day, as well as the duty of staying in the service of the general's staff.

The ranks were roused to jealousy and bitterness by a report that the third legion, under Gielgud, was covering itself with glory at Danzig, that the infantry of the first regiment had gone all the way to the sea, to Kolobrzeg. . . .

Finally, on the 26th of May, the news of the surrender of Danzig was read to the legion, together with the news of the march which the legion of Dombrovski was to make eastward in the direction of Niemen to join the Emperor.

At length the northern legion, too, set out from its place. On the 10th of June it went into quarters at Ostraga, waged a battle at Ruda and Waly or Wallendorf, started for Loken the next day, and on the 18th came to Gutstadt. Here, while marching from Gutstadt to Oelsee, they received an extraordinary message from the minister of war, a major of the great army, the Prince de Neufchatel. The day was torrid. Emerging from a cloud of dust, a French officer, accompanied by a postilion, came rushing head on upon the columns. They paid no attention to anyone. They made straight for the general of the division and confided the secret paper only directly to him.

The secrecy, however, lasted only a moment. Soon the senior officers came into the ranks and read the report of the great Friedland victory. The army stood in silence, as if stricken dead. Christopher Cedro listened to these tidings as if to a fairy-tale. He had the illusion that he was listening to the story of the old soldier, Oyrynski, called the Little Sword. Yes, everything is coming out as he had foretold in his simple language. Everything has come true, word for word. He confessed his feelings to Gaykos, who only stroked his great moustache.

"Well, now, of course! How could a soldier not understand another? For a corporal not to understand the Emperor! Everyone understands him as he understands his own soul. For it's our hands that push and carry him whither they will and his soul is our soul."

Soon afterwards came word-of-mouth reports. They spoke of the bold deeds of the third division, of its capture of two

guns, of the bravery of the cavalry and the coolness of the infantry, finally of the fact that the "lieutenant-general" was again wounded at Friedland.

The division of Zayonchek now set off in a rapid march for Rastenburg to pursue the enemy and to unite with the third legion. The cavalry was constantly in the path of the enemy's fire, in the field, in the vanguard. Christopher Cedro found himself, toward the end of June, in Oleck; on the 13th of July he was in Holyinka, not far from Grodno. About the 10th of July the army received the news of the treaty of Tilsit. The division of Zayonchek was ordered to Warsaw. It arrived there on the 15th of August. That same day came the order of the commander of the division announcing that all forces were going for a long and indeterminate stay to Kalisz.

Peace then and the end of their adventures. . . .

Thus thought young Cedro. He was to take quarters, or rather establish his residence, in this Kalisz as a common soldier or a roistering peace-time officer. He anticipated that his days would pass in playing cards, billiards, or dominoes, in idleness, debauchery, and boredom, at the club restaurant and in the company of fellow soldiers whom he already knew so well. He was not tempted by this prospect.

Is this the ideal for which one leaves one's old father? For this does one trample his hopes and illusions? For this does one live through that dread December day? No, never! Return home, then? Return as a warrior who had, indeed, smelled powder, but from very far? Who had made a rather wide horseback tour of the country? That too was impossible.

He had seen war from afar and there had grown into him, as a tree grows into the ground with boundless roots, a passion for a great and mighty deed. Was he to return to Treпка and their quiet agrarian tasks, to the industrious

“Your Worship! I saw a man in Warsaw.”

“Well?”

“A man like myself. Both of us came back from Naples, only I came back sooner, for I’m more foolish and I was homesick to death, while that scalawag was—like yonder wall. They came to Silesia.”

“What arms are they?”

“The Vistulian legion. My comrades from—phee—where not? From under the old darling yet. Where hadn’t they been! All the battles with the Austrian, Hohenlinden, the great march through Switzerland. Then in Cisalpine service. They finally went under King Joseph, while I managed to get back.”

“What are they doing now?”

“That’s just what my old comrade was telling me. They are fixing up our old Neapolitan legion. Some Prince Jerome has fallen in love with them.”

“Who is this Prince Jerome?”

“The Devil would know who he is! Prince Jerome he said and that’s all I know. Most likely the Emperor’s brother, or perhaps brother-in-law.”

“And what made him so fond of them?”

“What? That’s just what I’m about to tell you. My comrade told it all to me in regular order and I will tell it now to your Worship in the same way. And so they’re coming from Italy, these uh-lans of mine, and they come to their own Silesia, to Lignitsa. They’re coming down the highway, six hundred horse, in the night, in May. . . . Their nostrils caught the smell of their land after all those years. . . . There was, my friend tells me, a sizable mountain in those parts, and from it they first saw their country away off in the distance. They couldn’t talk, they were so moved, although they were hard devils, anything but soft inside! Ah, well, they

ride on and on over the highway, step by step; the night is still, it's getting on toward day-break. Captain Fialkovski's division was at the head. All of a sudden they see, coming straight at them in a mighty gallop, some high officer or other with his staff. He fell, bang! into the ranks; looks round at the faces with wide, staring eyes; heat is pulsing from him. 'Who are you, people,' he asks; 'how do you come to be here?'

"Captain Fialkovski tells him calmly—thus and so, they are Polish riders, they are coming straight from Naples to Lignitsa. Only now this general takes off his cap and tells him that he is no other than Lefebvre-Desnouettes himself. 'The Almighty Himself is sending you to my aid,' says he. 'I am battling with the Prussians. They left me here alone,' says he, 'with nothing but Saxons and Bavarians. The Saxons have betrayed me ignominiously, they won't fight with the Prussians; the Bavarians are fighting, but they cannot hold their ground. And here,' says he, 'they might start besieging Breslau, and in Breslau Prince Jerome has his quarters. Help me, brother Poles!' Fialkovski tells him: 'Fine! Fight the Germans?—delighted!'

"The regiment had already gone into quarters in Lignitsa, but they jump and trumpet the call: 'To horse!' The old host thought that the city was on fire, or some other devil, for there was no talk of the enemy in that part of the country. In seven minutes the regiment was in its stirrups like a strong, old oaken forest. They galloped down the high-road to a place called Jauer and from there took the cross-road running from Breslau and Lignitsa. The Prussians came just then in pursuit, with an overwhelming force. They had an even five thousand of first-class infantry; they had twelve pieces of ordnance, and a squadron of their hussars and a squadron of mounted Bosnian lancers besides that.

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"It was almost day. General Lefebvre took his place in the first rank of uhlans. The first and the third Polish squadrons shortened their reins. Charge arms! They pitch into the Prussian like a storm, in true Polish fashion, with every ounce of horse-power. With lances at the sons of dogs, stick them through! Their general hoisted twelve cannon to a hillock and started to fire into the fourth squadron, which was besetting them from the side, over the field. . . .

"Vain talk! It didn't take a moment and Prussian cavalry, dragoons, hussars, Bosnians and all, were knocked to pieces helter-skelter, heels over head! They pushed them back one on another so that their own horses crushed them, they spiked the infantry with lances, they gouged the twelve cannons from their midst like an eye and took them back behind their own lines, likewise the twelve caissons, took prisoner four thousand foot and all their supplies. The commander of these Prussians, some Anhalt or other, made off on his horse as fast as he could go. You couldn't have said two ayes and the battle was all over—the arms of the infantry laid trestlewise, the horsemen on the ground, their hands at their sides. By high noon the uhlans were getting on horseback to go to Lignitsa to sleep. And now if they don't up and burst into song—our own national anthem! For this it was that that Jerome came to love them so. And now they will go over the highway. . . ."

"Where to?"

"Over the highway, after the Emperor."

"But where?"

"To fight, that is all."

"Gaykos! Why, here. . . ."

"Eh, for me it stinks here among these—begging your pardon—captains, lieutenants, or even colonels. Lord have mercy on them! Colonels. . . . Nothing but colonel upon

colonel and behind them manure-slinging farm-hands. Didn't I see one with my own eyes who went and pushed the hammer on his carbine with his fist, from the top, and so honestly that he broke it off. The sergeant asked him delicately why he wasn't shooting. 'How,' says the other, 'can I shoot when my linchpin fell off?' And they had to stop right in the middle of the battle to show him that one doesn't have to push the hammer from the top, but that all one has to do is pull the trigger ever so lightly and the gun will go off by itself, as smart as can be. He was so surprised and worried that his mouth fell wide open. That's how clever this soldiery is."

"Stop your slandering, you old gadabout."

"Well, I say this only amongst ourselves. It's like bondage for me to sit round and yawn with nothing to do. Everyone of us remembers a hundred battles. Take a man like Pavlikovski! Once, all by himself, single-handed, he took prisoner fifty-seven German foot-soldiers. The entire army was astonished and shook with laughter from end to end. General Moreau, who was in command, wanted to make him an officer right on the spot. 'Put on your shoulder-straps,' says he, 'and tie the officerial sabre to your side.' At this Pavlikovski only shrugs his shoulders and says: '*N' s' leer, n' s' creer n' p' ofeesyay. . .*' And how are you to reward him? So they sent him some sort of fancy carbine with silver metalwork and long, fussy inscriptions stating that he is the soldier of soldiers. And was he the only one? Each one saw a mighty stretch of earth, Italy, France, Germany, mountains, seas, great heroes, and frightful military doings. What good does it do me to be ordered round by some half-fledged whippersnapper who hasn't smelled enough powder yet to have had a decent sneeze!"

"Is that your subordination?"

“As soon as we come to Kalisz I am going straightway to the commander and tell him my story. They were to have their depot there in that Kalisz. As long as we’re instructors—I teach these bantlings from day to day. But now we have peace. The selected company—farce! I would show them a selected company, they would crawl into the last mouse-hole for shame. Let those teach them who can. I’m no director. We are warriors. I, without war, am like a horse without a saddle. I’d take to drink, or, which heaven forbid, to wifing me. . . .”

After a moment he continued in a still lower whisper: “Your Worship! Let’s get away—the two of us. . . . You’ll make a soldier. I’ve seen your horsemanship and form. One can see that you’ve had your foot in the stirrup from a baby. They’ll spoil you here, these governors.”

“Never fear.”

“When I looked at that dress of that comrade of mine, at his equipment, his sword—Lord Almighty!”

“Yes?”

“They have the same colours which we were given away back in 1802 in Vigevano, dark blue with yellow. High caps on the head, blue, made of quilted broadcloth and trimmed with white cord. And the plume! This long! In the front a half-sun with an eagle.”

“What kind of eagle?”

“The devil I know what kind of an eagle!”

“A French one, I suppose, for it’s not a Polish regiment.”

“Yes, like as not with a French one, for they’re to get, day in and day out, ten sous from the Emperor’s treasury as pay. An eagle, I say, with a pair of lances crossed over it. That old fellow soldier of mine was from a company of grenadiers, so he had a red plume at his cap, red as fire. His coat is blue and fits him like a glove, while the facings,



lance is embellished with beautiful metalwork. In the middle is a white leather sling to be slipped over the forearm. At each stirrup is a boot open and ready for the butt of the lance and fastened to the stirrup-strap. If he fights with his sword, he throws the lance into the left boot. Their swords are right sharp, with yellow hilts, slings on them of white leather. Your Worship, how that lancer's costume would become you!"

"You are flattering me to no purpose at all."

"I am speaking the truth. . . . Haven't I seen with my own eyes? He sits on his horse as though he was bolted on, he attends to his friend the horse by himself, saddles and unsaddles him like an ostler, and he isn't even a sergeant yet, for he doesn't care. There are such indifferent men in our ranks. I've seen a good number of them. He'll fight to the death, bear every mortal hardship; he'll meet death without a word. The Devil would know what sort of people these are! I have met more than one of them, as I say, in the Italian legions and I still don't know where they come from.

"But there's the other kind too. He will ride on his horse like a Jew with cracknels; he wouldn't know, to save his life, what to praise and what to dispraise in the line, but he'll be a captain straightway, for he has an estate in the same parish as the grossmajor. When there were we who got our chevrons mid foreign nations. Not until you'd shown your Sarmatian valour to four or five nations and astounded the oldest fighters so that they gaped with their mouths, and a whisper went through the regiments, not until you had raised the fame and honour of the whole legion by some great deed, did they let you sew on that small piece of galleon. Our staff officers came up from the common rank and file. Your Worship—let's join the lancers!"





“Sh!”

“Why not? Do we need money—gold? For the copper penny you get as pay you can always buy a bag of fodder, a sheaf of hay, a lump of bread. You’ll find a well by the side of every highway. And oftentimes, one of the Emperor’s common riders, you will drink such wines by the pitcherful as kings grudge kings at festivals. . . .”

“And where is it you want to go, you old madcap?”

“Your Worship, until such time as he’ll have seen to all of this world of ours, don’t you dare to take your foot out of the stirrup. Wherever he goes, there go we. If he is taking rest and peace, we take our sleep. But when he gets on horseback, are we to keep on sleeping? That’s what our elders used to say. And they were no common sort. Men who by this time have fallen face downward in bloody battle and are now lying in foreign countries without a cross—without remembrance and name. For could it all have come to pass as it did if there was no justice in it? Could those dead have been scattered over foreign sands all for naught? And didn’t we come back to our homesteads, to these woods, wherever we were needed? We came from the end of the world, for he had given us his commander’s word on it. We’ll go once more into the far ends of earth, set it all to rights, and then back to our own parts once more—only then for the last time, for good. That’s what our elders used to say. . . .”

The importunate whispers of the old sergeant were, for Cedro, that tiny dram which tips the sensitive scale. An unconquerable aversion to the shame and duplicity of his life in Vienna, where his trampled pride used to tear his soul to shreds, pushed him toward the land of the old soldier’s simple dreams.

In Kalisz Gaykos and he petitioned for a discharge from





their company and asked to be transferred to the lancers. They were advised against that step for a very long time, various technical formalities interfered with their plans, but finally, in October, they made their way to the citadel in Koziel, which contained a squadron of lancers composed of seasoned legionaries. It was a throng of tanned, mustachioed roughs, giants all, cynics, seekers after every sort of adventure. Cedro had to pay his way into the ranks with a very generous hand and to swallow much surly carping before he was finally accepted. The old rogues looked askance at young recruits to their numbers, particularly at "virtuous" enthusiasts. For Gaykos, on the other hand, a place was found both open and ready, together with hope of early advancement.

In the beginning of winter came orders for the army to start for Silesia and to march to Osnabruck. From there they proceeded to Westphalia. In Erfurt the variously accoutred companies were put into uniform costume and spent the entire winter in that city. There were higher and lower officers in this numerous army, brought together from under various standards, older and younger men, of cavalry and even infantry origin.

In the spring of 1808 the reorganized regiment set forth on a great march—away off to Bayonne. It went through Gotha, Eisenach, Fulda, Hanau, Mainz by way of Mézières, Charleville, Paris, Le Mans, Alençon, Bordeaux, Dax. Toward the end of April, after crossing the wide reaches of the Garonne below Langon and passing the sandy stretches of Guienne and Gascony, the cork-oak forest at Roquefort and the chestnut groves below Mont-de-Marsan, they entered the department of Landes and began to march over sad and drowsy fields of sand. The infantry sailed in boats and on rafts down the river Adour, which rolled its billows to the

left of the ancient highway through Tartas and Dax. The cavalry marched slowly over the road. It was a dreary journey, ungladdened by a single more pleasant sight.

In the course of these long cavalry-marches from the shores of the Niemen to the shores of the Garonne, Christopher Cedro grew sunburned, stouter, and sturdier, and developed a hale and hearty spirit. He was lost as an individual in the harsh and coarse multitude, he withdrew into himself and became silent. He was of constant good cheer, carefree, merry, engrossed in his soldier's duties and affairs. Essentially, however, he was making his march in absolute solitude. They moved by night. When, just before dusk, the trumpeter gave the call "to horse," when the human squadrons became planted in the saddle and the regiment gathered, formed, and slowly started on its way, Christopher began to live. The divisions, tired during the day with cleaning their horses, with sergeant's revisions, with repairing of equipment and shoeing horses, slept soundly in the saddle. The men slept, wrapped in their cloaks against the cold of the spring night, and so did the journeying horses. Step by step the sleepy regiment proceeded through the poplar arcades of the "sweet land" of France. The blue-grey expanses of field sank slowly in the gentle April gloaming, in the witching dusk. Distant, grey stone houses, church spires, farms, and towns, old castles, and woods, were absorbed by the softly falling night. The earth seemed slowly to change into something which had no being, into the life of bygone years, into a dream routed by reality. The heavens alone, filled with pellucid air and still vibrant with the only just hushed song of the lark, with the only just extinguished radiance of the wakening fields, gave witness of what had been. The sharp, moist wind blowing from the lea and trailing a fleet, smile-begetting mist laden with the perfume of violets would not permit the youth to sleep hard.

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The endless colonnades of poplars, already decked in new leaves and trembling with newly-wakened life, spoke in a rustling whisper of undying fame and glory. This rustle pierced and filled his soul. One had the sensation that these sounds were the muffled whispers of ancient wandering hordes, the evening prayers of the Visigoths migrating into Iberia. Over the dusty fields of Gascony they go to the west, the setting-place of the eternal sun. They wade from out dark and humid wilds, from sullen nameless lowlands, from beyond the mountains of Germany, toward the region where the sun leaves the sky to fall into the sea. They marched toward the everlasting sun. Whose whip-lash drove them from the forest lairs which their sinewy arms had wrested from the beasts? Did an enemy stronger than the wolf and the aurochs gnaw them out of their home? Who carries before them the banner of pillage, the watchword of violence, the brigand sword? They rose from out the darkness of earth as rises a boundless billow from the bosom of the sea, they lifted themselves from the silent wastes like a plague-cloud of locusts and they move with a humming rustle like an invincible standard of youth and strength. They flounder through sand-dunes, they ford rivers, they swarm through forests. They will devour the fruits of another's delving on the shores of warm, blue seas; they will steal the wives and daughters of unknown tribes and settle on fragrant uplands covered with myrtle, cypress, and orange.

"We are following the trail of Charlemagne," mused Christopher. "From Niemen, over the Rhine, from Germany to the land of the Celtiberians. The route of the Emperor. . . ."

Christopher had never seen the Emperor with his eyes, but now, in their nights of wandering, it seemed to him that he had known him for a very long time. This great Em-

peror, as in the song which had slept a thousand years, was very old; he must have reached the limit of his earthly span, he must be over two hundred years old. He has dragged his feet through so many lands, his shield has repulsed so many blows, he has reduced so many kings to want and misery. . . . When will he weary of his bloody toil?

"Never!" the young lips whisper, answering the humming of the trees.

"Until the peoples' faith shall have been fulfilled and his work done. . . ."

For, lo, they have already passed hundreds of rivers, they have passed proud and noisy Paris, a hundred cities, they have entered the smooth Gascon plains. When morning comes, they see before them, hazily at first, but more and more clearly as the day increases, shapes like distant, distant clouds. . . ."

But the wind did not scatter these clouds. They stood and stood. Golden trails, dark, sinuous trenches, threaded their way over them.

The sleepy hosts of soldiery pointed to the distant land, exclaiming that at last one could see the Pyrenees. Cedro strained his eyes towards the distant scene and sought his trail amid the mountains.

"Roncesvalles!" he whispered, smiling to the sunny vision of that song which escaped intact when entire nations have perished and been forgotten. The sky-blue phantasm of the hills was beautiful, as beautiful as the Song of Roland itself. It stood misty and vague, like the song. The eye caught its outlines avidly, fearful lest they fall apart and vanish amid the clouds. A thundering voice comes from these sky-reaching mountains, the strident voice of Roland's horn:

"The valiant Roland raised his gold trumpet. Fiercely he blew it to north and south—the mountains trembled, the

cliffs re-echoed, the ringing clarion wakened the hills. Such was the anguish, such the despair, with which brave Roland winded his horn that his mouth issued a crimson blood-stream and the charged blood veins sundered his brow. The woeful summons crossed the tall mountains. . . .”

Christopher's heart was trembling. A lust of deeds—the deeds of Roland, of Archbishop Turpin, deeds which one lifts out of nothingness by one's own death, deeds beloved for ages—old and lovely songs, deeds entwined by the ivy of legend, changed into folklore by the sighs of long generations—glowed in his soul. Riding his horse, he dreamed a waking dream. He dreamed words long forgotten, words flowing from an unknown world:

“The great Charlemagne rushed to his succour. He came to a meadow—but oh, the dread horror! the flowers are pearly with blood-red dew-drops. His heart is riven by a dour sorrow; his eyes well with tears, but the tears bring no surcease. The doughty King stops in the shade of a pine-tree, he raises his eyes—and, lo, there before him, sword-graven fissures dent the white marble. He looks to the ground; there on the greensward lies a man's body. The heart of the King stops beating with pain. He runs and with hands which tremble like aspen lifts the knight's head from its place on the ground. But grief overwhelmed the heart of the King, and senseless he fell the body beside. . . .”

A pride, the pride in whose dark recesses surge and spin huge, still unformed designs, swelled his breast. A feeling of strong, manly valour infused itself into his desires, into his impulses, much as the clear, hearty air of the mountains infuses itself into the body.

In the first days of May the cavalry of the Vistulian legion arrived in Bayonne. The Emperor lived here in the Castle Marrac, keeping two Spanish kings at his side:

Charles IV and Ferdinand VII. A huge army peopled the city, and the country-side was deserted. The bold Gascons were churlish with supplies even under the very eye of the Emperor. The region was particularly poor in fodder for the horses; so was the region of the river Nive and of the Adour.

The result was that when an additional thousand horses and lancers came into the city for a longer stay, the intendants lost their heads. The very next morning a company of uhlans was designated to go foraging into the highlands beyond Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the department of Basses-Pyrénées, on the very frontier of Spain. It was said that the region already abounded in tall grasses. Christopher Cedro, as a soldier who spoke French very fluently, was made part of this company.

They left, just barely washed of their grime and dust, without seeing the city. They set out over the old road, in the direction of Irun. On their right hand they had continuous dunes, mounds of sand screening the rest of the world, sullen, semicircular ridges and billows sprinkled here and there with a sparse scattering of tamarisk shrubs. The way-worn division was reminded of its native juniper. Beyond Saint-Jean-de-Luz the mountain chains began to loom on the left as far as Ustaritz. Dusk was approaching when the small detachment reached the first high curve. They were swept by the chilly breath of mountains.

In the radiant glow of twilight they saw the entire chain of the snowy Pyrenees. To the south an unmeasured wall stood before them, descending into the earth with steep, bottomless abysms, as though it had been riven in half by bolts of thunder. To the west lay the Cantabrians, stretching in a fading line which turned into a streak, a hazy blue mist on the pale azure of the sky, a dream of the gazing eye, until

at length it escaped it and was lost in the nothingness beyond. Nearer stretched dark, deep-blue hills covered with measureless reaches of sea-shore pine, the country of Guipúzcoa.

Straight before them, protruding from a sheer side of rock, were the castle and scabrous walls of the fortress of Fuenterrabia. The dark, reddish, rounded turret of the castle caught Christopher's eye. It was strangely awesome, this solitary, jutting tower. He stopped and looked at it, ensorcelled by its silent past, by its wild, yet unspeakably beautiful boldness. The setting sun brought it into sharp relief, this old citadel whose walls had so often streamed with blood.

Christopher stood in his stirrups. Dazzled by the majesty of the mountains, he could not move from his place. He was crushed by an overwhelming emotion, an overpowering reverence.

"How great, how strong, how mighty is man!" he thought passionately. "How much he has accomplished on this earth! These unmeasured reaches of mountain, these regions which the swiftest, keenest eye cannot take in, are his, yoked by his short hand, fashioned into one domain. Above the fathomless abyss and over the highest peak his will lies planted and secure. Fuenterrabbia, resting in silence on its rocky foundation, stands like a heraldic eagle or vulture or wolf blazoned on a giant escutcheon.

"How vast his importance! How wide his dominion! Iberians. . . . Celts. . . . Goths. . . . Romans. . . . Moors"

The men, women, and children of the razed city of Numantia, of which no trace, no sign, is left—nothing save a name and an undying glory amid the tribes of men. . . . The great, fiery giant, Diaz Campeador Cid. . . . Cristóbal Colón. . . . Hernando Cortés and the dread Pizarro. . . .

Dusk was slowly falling over the mountains. Christopher

spurred his horse and started after his company. He followed a zigzag course to still another bend in the road. A village stood there composed of some three- or four-score stone houses. The soldiers had already dismounted and were kindling a fire with wood and dry ass-dung which they were gathering on all sides for that purpose. Christopher placed his horse at a manger in some empty little stable and went to the village to view it more closely. He came to the rocks bounding a small planted field and suddenly stopped in amazement. Straight below him fell a perpendicular wall, and at its foot, stretching on into infinity, was—the ocean.

Christopher Cedro stood in the darkness and could not go away, so spellbound was he by the tempestuous affairs of the sea. He had before him the living waters of which he had dreamed, waking and sleeping; he saw them unbridled and released from their girths. They hooted before him, coming from afar. Something like a swift roar of thunder rang in their chests and limbs as they struck the submerged reefs. Here is another breaker visible in the gloom of the night.

Its back is arched into a bow and shaggy with matted hair, like the back of the king of beasts when he prepares for a leap. It runs dread and beautiful, eternally young with excess of strength. It leaped over the crocodiles and elephants, over the hippopotami and rhinoceroses, over the likenesses of camels and turtles; with a fleet bound, it fell upon the high, unbroken strand. The mass of water rushed into the rocky caverns, lapping and champing in their hollow depths. A storm of graceful, snow-white foam shot upward in a maze of silver threads and switches. A moment later it gave a prolonged hiss as the frothy stream struck the dry slates of the incline, the pores and holes of the limestone crags.

The more intense grew the darkness, the wider and deeper grew the voice of the sea. From the wild uproar, from the

noisy chaos, from the medley of sounds of the riven deep, from the rustling and plashing of the waters, rose a barren voice, not quite and yet like a distant solo, not quite and yet like a prophecy of events to come, not quite and yet like a psalm of events past. The watery abyss raised this psalm in the shadowy, greyish radiance of the moon. It told the cold face of the lifeless sphere, the sphere whose other side has never shown itself to earth, of the eternal toil of the sea. It told how each day the surfaces of all the seas show themselves in turn to the dead eyes of Selene. It told of the ocean, how obediently its circling whirls rise from their beds, how they wander and beat against rock-bound shores, how, turning on their pivots, they flee back into the sea in a series of indolent, moribund streams. They told the story of how the sea destroys some rocks, while others it moulds and adorns through long ages; how it tears some shores with the talons of a vulture, while it builds and nurtures others; how industriously it fills and buries existing ports, while elsewhere it works with pickax and sledge to hammer a gate in the riven earth.

The song grows in power. A prophetic voice rings in it, singing the annals of the sea and the shore. What is the dry shore upon which man has spread his dominion and graved the arms of his empire?

It was conceived in the womb of the ocean, and the ocean can destroy it in the course of one day. In the womb of the ocean formed its sand, its layers of clay, its marls and the hulks of its rocks, the cliffs of limestone, the blocks of granite which lie on the pinnacles of the Pyrenees and the Alps. The ocean once covered the highest peaks of the mountains. Before the advent of time its body had delivered the shore as a father gives forth a son. It threw it naked beneath the sun, the moon, and the stars, sent it forth weak and powerless to be nursed by the vacuous air.

37. Beyond the Mountains

IN the latter part of May, after a three weeks' rest in Bayonne, Konopka's regiment of lancers set off into the mountains. It went, not by way of Irun, but by a shorter route leading straight into Aragon, the ancient trail of Charlemagne over the gorges of Roncesvalles. Just outside Bayonne they entered a valley which stretched to the left. They proceeded between two chains of wooded hills in a south-easterly direction, through a locality called Macaye, as far as Jax. Here they stopped for the night.

The road tilted sharply here and led westward and uphill to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. The next day they passed through Valcarlos and entered the vertiginous heights of the stony Pyrenees. The paths were so narrow; so precipitous, and, in the morning, so slippery with thawing snow, that they had to make that whole passage on foot, leading the horses by the bridle.

It was so cold that the uhlans put on all the clothing that they owned. Every soldier wore his everyday uniform over his parade garb and over this his coarse canvas smock and the working-trousers which he wore when cleaning horses. Over their shakos they pulled black oilcloth bags, turning down the flaps and tying them under their chins to protect their ears and necks from the fierce mountain winds and draughts. They put on their cloaks over all this and wrapped themselves in them. The officers who, to preserve their swagger and dash, refused to draw the yellow oilcloth bags over their caps, froze unmercifully. Consequently fires were kindled very frequently.

The soldier walked on the precipice side and pushed his snorting Mazovian courser over against the rock. He could barely restrain him, for the animal tugged and trembled with

cold and terror at the sight of the abyss. From time to time Aragonese mountaineers appeared in the fissures, armed with muskets. They shot from afar and, without waiting for an encounter, disappeared in crevices as black as they. Kostanecki, marching at the head of his squadron, sent them a volley of balls from the carbines which the officers, subalterns, and flankers had received in Bayonne, and that ended the skirmishes.

Cedro, tramping beside his horse, chattered with cold, but at the same time glowed with delight. He was happy at the thought that he was marching through Roncesvalles. He had a sensation that knightly spurs were being bestowed on him.

In the course of the next two days the regiment of lancers proceeded slowly and carefully down the mountain paths. They came at rare intervals across shepherd settlements, empty in the main and with closed doors. They did not rest until they reached Pampeluna, a fortress already occupied by a French garrison under the command of General Lefebvre-Desnouettes, an old friend of the Poles. Leaving the Pampeluna of Pompey in the advance guard of a small corps of General Lefebvre's forces, and marching to the south, the Polish regiment, on the 6th of June, met its first body of armed populace. As the riders approached, this gathering dispersed and scattered in all directions. They proceeded then through Taffala, Olite, Caparoso, in the direction of Valtierra, a town lying on the banks of the Ebro. Thence the road turned eastward to Tudela, running constantly at the very edge of the river, in its valley. In Tudela there was to be a bridge and from that point not a trace of a road on this side of the river. At a certain point in this march they came upon a deserted village. The host was hungry, the horses exhausted, so that, after the posts were placed, the men scattered through the village in quest of fodder and food.

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One of the foragers found a hidden store of wheat in the church, behind the great altar. They poured it generously into the empty mangers. While the men were busy cooking food for themselves, the heated horses champed greedily on the Spanish wheat. The next morning sounds of shots came from the direction of the outposts. The regiment jumped to its feet. When they began to saddle the horses, all noted that the mounts could not rise. Some of them, lifted up, kept their footing with difficulty and could not stand on the fore part of their hoofs. Their hoofs were hot, as though filled with fire. The brave steeds pushed their forelegs hideously to the front and their hind legs forward under their bellies to support the weight of the body. Their heads dropped, and finally the bodies fell impotently to the ground.

In spite of every recourse—intense rubbing, blood-letting, paring the hoofs—twelve horses fell dead that very day. The rest were barely able to start out from the village. The small army of Lefebvre which followed in the tracks of the advanced guard overtook the uhlans in its rapid march to the east, along the left bank of the Ebro, to occupy Tudela. Christopher had to lead his horse by the bridle and proceed at its side on foot. At first he had a dozen or more companions, some of whom passed him riding their horses at a walking pace, others tramping beside them, as was he. About noon it began to rain, a heavy, unceasing, oppressive down-pour. The horses weakened still more and tottered on their feeble legs. Towards evening the perplexed Cedro suddenly realized that he was alone on the road. He saw no one round him. Some of his companions' horses were dead; others lay powerless on the road, with outstretched legs. He continued to walk attentively by the head of his equine companion, meeting these fallen horses lying without saddles and bridles. He watched his with all the greater care and with growing

despair. He walked more and more slowly, in order not to lose him on the way. The horse shook with fever, stood on the heels of his hoofs, staggered, and whinnied dully. The rider tore his shirt into strips and bandaged the hoofs over compresses of wet clay. It was getting on toward sunset when the horse tottered and fell beside a way-side ditch. He bit the ground with his teeth; his nostrils threw out a flaming breath. He tossed violently, once, twice, three times. A profound shiver ran through his body; the beautiful head fell stonily upon the soft ground. The fiery breath ceased. . . .

The rider stood over him in profound grief, his gaze fixed on the extinct eyes, on the strange, as if derisive and yet infinitely painful smile of the mouth.

The unexpected obstacle came to the soldier like a blow on the chest and roused him from his proud, knightly meditations. This faithful, loved companion had brought him here from his native land, through so many countries, so many waking dreams, taking him to the place of glory. . . . Now he was laughing at it all with the bitter smile of death.

As not one of his companions was to be seen anywhere on the road and as night was approaching, Christopher unbuckled the belt of the saddle-blanket and the girth, and pulled off the bridle and the breast strap. He trembled and staggered as his hands came in contact with the warm, inflated belly and the veins of the head, still throbbing with blood. He threw the blanket, the saddle and pad and bridle on his own shoulders, took the lance in his hand, and resumed his way over the high-road. He walked at top speed in order to overtake his regiment. He looked about him in all directions, but, seeing not a living soul anywhere, he began to run downhill in an even, measured step. The rain came down thicker and thicker. The country-side continued unchanged: hummocky to the north, bristling with perpendicular cliffs to the south, and cut



by the valley of the Ebro. At some moment Christopher ate the crust of bread which he had put away the preceding day in the leather sack beside his holsters. But the crust was small and, as it constituted both breakfast and dinner, wholly insufficient to appease the wanderer's hunger. He took a drink from a small spring which he met on his way, and continued to scan the country-side. Standing on a slight elevation, he saw before him at a considerable distance a highway winding like a ribbon in the valley of the river. From the place where he stood, a narrower, local road stretched leftward to the river, cutting across the entire basin like a bow-string. It seemed to Christopher that this side road afforded a much shorter way to the high-road which he saw in the distance. Without further thought he took this trail. He took the pistols from the holsters as he ran, thrust them into his belt, pulled his lance close to his side, fastened his sword high, and rushed on without fear. His cloak was drenched with rain and weighed him down oppressively. The white sheepskin saddle-cloth was also wet. From its blue toothed border, pointed drops of water fell on his neck. His left side was lightened by the removal of the pistols from the holsters; his knapsack now pulled on the right and pained his shoulder.

The various straps and belts and girths of the saddle and bridle slipped constantly out of his hands and tangled around his feet. He had covered thus perhaps ten stadia of field when the last beams of the sun, filtering through the streams of rain, revealed to him, not far away, a peculiar scene. At first he thought that someone was praying under the way-side crucifix, with piously folded hands. Coming nearer he shuddered and grew numb with fright. A pair of hastily impacted fence-posts stood amid the trees, joined on top by a cross-piece. Hanging from this transverse beam was a French *voltigeur*, still wearing his uniform and knapsack. His hands





were tied behind with a piece of cord, his arms turned upward at the shoulders, and his body suspended by them from the beam, as killed game is hung on hooks in a smoke-house. Cedro called to him from a distance of a few steps. He received no answer.

He slowly approached the figure and only then seized all the details. The arms, it seemed, had been twisted after the pole was inserted into the knot which bound the hands, since the shoulder and upper arms protruded from the split uniform as bare knees protrude from torn trousers. The mouth was gagged with a rag rolled into a hard wad, the nose cut off, the ears torn from the head. On the bare breast were perhaps thirty black wounds. The entrails, ripped from the abdomen, lay on the ground. The corpse was wrapped up to the waist in something which still emitted a black, sooty smoke, although the fire kindled under the feet had been put out by the rain. Cedro touched the projecting shoulder. It was cold.

He groaned at the sight of the black bones of the legs, frightfully swollen from the scorching, wrapped in straw dipped in oil. He took the body off the spit as fast as he could and laid it on the grass. As he stood over the body, his legs spread and his eyes fixed on the mutilated form, the rag in its mouth so much like a fat cigar, the neck bloated, the eyes gouged to the surface by the frightful pain so that they seemed like two balls of red stone, the ears lopped off, the belly ripped open, the pile of entrails hanging like a copious watch-chain hung with numerous charms, he began to shake with a peculiar inward laughter. Without thinking of it he felt that he was laughing, laughing like his faithful horse that had died on the Pampeluna road. A vague, muddled thought, not part of his soul, a reduction, as it were, of this sight to a formula, slipped swiftly and lightly through his brain amid revulsive spasms of unwholesome laughter: the

devil! not always is suffering beautiful, not always, not always!

He picked up the lance, which he had dropped on the ground, shouldered the saddle, wrapped the straps round his neck so that they would not be in his way, and set off once more at a flying pace. Dusk was already falling, swift and black. The lonely pedestrian strained his faulty eyes to see the road and not to lose his way in the darkness. He was surrounded, when the twilight passed into night, by whispers, murmurs, rustles of trees, rustles of olive-trees and platans foreign to the ear. He had not heard their like in all his life. . . . The distant splash of the River Ebro. . . . Field locusts hissing in the surrounding onset of dark. Striking unexpectedly against the iron bit, the heart-shaped rosette of the breast-band gives a ringing tinkle. Stirrup strikes stirrup and gives a sudden ring, the girth-buckles squeak, and in a flash the hair stands on end! They're coming! They're drawing near! The heart beats. . . . A band of peasants, skulking along the hedgerow . . . their lips shut tight, their eyes half closed with frenzy, in their hands—puncheons. If at least one could see! If at least one could catch sight of the place and of those men! Measure their number with one's eyes! Defend oneself, by God! For he can defend himself, can't he?—and die like a soldier! But to perish ignobly, amidst an ignoble mob, amidst frenzied beasts throwing themselves in a band upon one man! Like the other—to have his arms wrenched for hours, his feet burned over a slow fire!

Unwittingly he walked through this foreign place on tip-toe, more and more softly, as though on feet already burned. It seemed to him that those torn-out entrails were his entrails, those gouged eyes his eyes. . . .

"Coward, coward!" he mumbled softly, hastening his step. This outcry worked for a moment, but the curtain came loose

before long, revealing the scorched body of the *voltigeur*, and the hideous grovelling terror rushed back into the heart. Christopher's steps became silent, like the steps of a fox or a hyena. The intent eyes pierced the rain and the murk. Now and then flaming phantoms flashed through them, as though revealed by a sudden bolt of lightning; at other times flat, square, black shapes loomed into view. At certain points the sound of his own footsteps came to him noisily, multiplied by ten, as though the human pack were already at his heels. A cry struggled to tear itself from his breast, but his will choked it back. He would stand for a moment and listen, a pistol cocked in his hand.

The silence continued unyielding on all sides.

The path which he was following, stony, and furrowed from the rains, was hemmed in on both sides by a low fence of rough boulders and these saved the wanderer from losing his way. He stumbled on them several times, now on the left, now on the right side. He felt that he was walking uphill, in water which ran over the stones with a liquid rustle. He was perspiring, out of breath from the weight of the saddle. He stopped on an elevation. By the sharpness of the wind he recognized that he was at the very top of the rise. He made a few steps more, and suddenly, at no very great distance, he beheld lights. He groped for the stone wall, seated himself on the edge, and began to ask himself over and over again: "Who can it be, burning those fires? Foe or friend?" His ears caught the bark of a dog. . . . Neither the French nor the Poles had a dog. . . . Far off a horse whinnied. . . . Whose horse? Silence once more. It was broken by a delightful sound, like the echo of an organ; then again silence.

Christopher was somewhat rested and had recovered his breath. He started in the direction of the fires with the silent steps of a nocturnal incubus. Coming down from the rise, he

heard in another direction the distant call of the outguards:  
“*Qui vive?*”

His heart began to beat like a hammer. The road parted here and went off in several directions. It was cut by wide stone terraces. On one of the inclines he suddenly saw a huge fire at his side, so near that he stopped in utter amazement. He could not move from his place. It was not a window glowing from a light within, nor an open door, but something like a huge, square maw leading into a fiery interior.

He heard human noises.

Straining his ear he heard, to his supreme joy, the French language, light, military songs, outcries, quarrels. . . . He ran thither, jumping over wet vines, climbing over hedges, and falling into ditches full of water. Soon a sentry placed the point of a carbine against his breast. The sentry himself could scarcely utter the question, so terrified was he by the sight of the saddle surmounting the head of the uhlan looming at him out of the darkness. The new-comer could barely utter the *mot d'ordre* so weary was he. They examined him from all sides by the light of the lantern and admitted him to the fire, in his dripping clothes, together with his saddle and spear. That was the kind-hearted decision of the corporal who was called to view the wayfarer. Christopher ran down a score of steps and found himself at the threshold of the nave of a deep, spacious church. A dozen or more fires blazed under its principal vault, and in the side chapels, separated by pillars from the main body of the church. Candles were burning on the altars. Large numbers of them glowed in various other places, under the choir and in it, on the pulpit and in the porches. Some two thousand soldiers bivouacked there with noise and song. Some were already snoring, stretched at full length on the carpeted floor beneath the choir, between the pillars, about and even on the altars.

Others were standing round the fires, roasting quarters of meat, young pigs, turkeys, cocks; still others were butchering more fowls and picking them. Cedro was possessed by a feeling of inexpressible joy. He was no longer exposed to stealthy attack and the frightful death of the *voltigeur*, he was not surrounded by solitude amidst black fields, his back was no longer drenched by the steady stream of rain. Fire, light, a firm, dry place to stand on! Noisy, excited talk! All round him the strength and gaiety of healthy men!

For a few minutes he could not gather what was happening here or why his jovial comrades were in such a festive mood. His eyes sought out an unoccupied place by the wall and he hastened to take it, stretching his numb legs with a sensation of profound delight. Instantly his dripping cloak and uniform made a puddle about his figure. The smoke of the fires filled the recesses of the vaults and trailed toward the door. The rain squirted in through the broken panes of the windows. A damp cold pushed in from outdoors and blew about his feet.

From the clouds of smoke, in the glare of some dozen candles fastened in the cornices of the pulpit, a French grenadier appeared from time to time. Having thrown a surplice over his uniform and a stole round his neck, he was delivering a sermon about the most obscene phenomena of life and the most hideous enormities which a cavalier's imagination could crowd into the scanty forms of anecdote. He illustrated his address in the drollest manner in the world, by plucking a large cock and from time to time, with grandiloquent gestures, dropping the picked feathers upon the listening company. At the same time he crowed and mimicked the cackling of startled hens in truly amusing fashion. Cedro was laughing uproariously, a dead, mechanical laughter produced by his sides and throat and accompanied by a feeling of revul-

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sion. All round him, without cease, confessionals were being broken; carved stalls and benches, catafalques, stairs, ladders, candlesticks, were being chopped to pieces; wooden vessels, symbols of the past, through their old age, more truly than objects having real existence, were being crushed and splintered. They were thrown upon the pyres, together with standards, with missals in ancient bindings, with time-darkened pictures in massive frames; and the fires blazed higher and higher. Heavy-eyed, Christopher looked at the white places left by the pictures torn from the walls, squares where flimsy cobwebs fluttered in the wind.

He yawned, shrivelling and huddling together plaintively. On the marble mosaic of the floor stood pools of blood of calves, pigs, cocks, and turkeys. Veritable caravans of down and feathers trailed at the feet of the soldiers. The talk was mainly French, but German, Polish, Spanish, and even Dutch sounds occasionally broke through the medley.

"Hollanders in Spain in the role of conquerors . . ." thought Christopher lazily, yawning from the bottom of his heart.

Just then at the door leading to the sacristy sounded the tinkle of a bell, familiar to the Catholic ear, announcing the commencement of the mass. All dropped their tasks and turned in that direction. And, indeed, a disguised throng of soldiers was coming out of the sacristy. In the front advanced a file as if of altar boys in surplices and crimson capes. Each of these, with a modest mien and humbly downcast eyes, carried a large, moss-covered bottle. They stood the bottles in a row on the great altar and, folding their little hands, ran hurriedly down to the steps. After them there came from the sacristy a foot-soldier, with a moustache like two fox-tails, in a gleaming cope and biretta, behind him a second in a chasuble, a third in only an alb which he raised in

The mob of soldiers clapped its hands and howled with delight. The others, with buffoon airs, placed upon the altar the jugs they had brought. They rolled upon the altar a cask which others had brought, and placed it over the ciborium. The soldier in the cope took the censer from the hands of one of his comrades and suddenly began to whirl in a wildly indecorous dance and to perform monstrous devotions. The man capered and threw out his legs. In the course of his antics the skirts of the vestment opened and revealed the fact that the celebrant did, indeed, wear a coat, but without the other, most indispensable part of a uniform which happened to be drying just then at one of the fires. In the course of these profanations the soldiers who were dressed in surplices pushed a grey-haired little man in night-shirt and short drawers into the space in front of the altar. The one wearing the cope pulled him upon the altar steps and introduced him to the spectators as the parish priest.

A howl of joy rang out in the entire church. Cedro rejoiced as much as the rest of his chilled and drenched companions, despite his true inward feelings. The ceremony of bringing in the bottles and jugs really engrossed him. Even

“communicants,” anxious to partake of the wine in the cask. The soldier in the cope was passing the goblets among the drinkers. Christopher stood apart at one of the fires, warming and drying himself and looking round. The delicious hissing of the pig roasting on a bayonet irritated him beyond endurance. He was consumed with shame at the thought of asking for a morsel, but hunger was contorting his inwards. The men looked at him askance. They began to mutter among themselves with obvious ill will and moved together about the fire in such a way as to shut off his access to it. Cedro gave them a haughty look and walked away with upthrust chin, to the accompaniment of an ever louder abdominal symphony. Just then the organ burst into sound and the church was filled with the melody of a lively “steyer.” One of the chapels was turned into a sort of ball-room. A number of men were dancing there with extraordinary vivacity and remarkable gestures. Particularly noteworthy in the latter respect was a certain grenadier. He was dancing, holding in his arms, with solicitous and subtle elegance, a fair-sized pig. He made believe that he was whirling in the figures of the Styrian dance in completely oblivious rapture, with a fair and lissom maiden in his fond embrace. Inasmuch as he pinched and twirled the tail of the young pig with his right hand, the animal squealed outrageously, and the dancer sought to solace its pain with passionate whispers. The soldiery howled with delight.

Pushing through the crowd toward the altar, Christopher caught sight of the old parson. The poor wretch was casting his eyes about, standing in a dark corner among the headstones and slowly, very slowly, moving in a certain direction, apparently in the hope that, once the mob was well in its cups, he would be able to slip out unobserved. The famished lancer came up to the priest and, in a sharp, hard tone,

Christopher was touched by a short, fleeting pity. He walked up to the old man and touched his shoulder. When the other raised his head, Christopher looked into his face with good, kindly eyes. He nodded, nodded. . . . Then he kissed the priest's hand and whispered into his ear: "Reverend father, give me whatever food you have left, for I'm dying of hunger."

The priest raised his tear-flooded eyes to him and, wringing his hands, indicated the destruction of the sacred fittings, vestments, vessels. . . . They were bent toward each other, and Cedro was about to explain to the old churchman in a kindly, indulgent manner that no doubt it was the Lord Himself punishing him for his cult of wine and calves by the sacrilegious incense-burning before the carefully nursed barrel of Malaga, when the priest bent down and began to pick up the albs and stoles and to put them stealthily, hurriedly, reverently, into the drawers. Christopher did not interrupt him. He looked round, to see if he would not come across still another profaned object, or something to eat. . . . In the course of these activities he heard the scrape of a lock in the darkest corner of the sacristy. He glanced up and made a step in that direction, but he saw only the back and heels of the rector. The door slammed to and a key grated swiftly on the other side of it. Angered by this, Cedro jumped to pursue the priest, but, pressing the door-knob, found that the door had indeed been locked from the other side.

The churchman had made his escape beyond any doubt.

There remained no other course but to return to the presbytery and seek food there. He stopped behind some others in front of the altar. The heated mob continued to kneel one by one on the steps and to lap the Malaga and the Andalusian Alicante, taking the gold goblet from the hands of the robed soldier in orderly turn. Christopher was already at the altar,

waiting his turn to kneel on the steps and drink like the others. He was almost beside himself with hunger and even more so with thirst. Suddenly an overpowering contempt surged up in him like a gush of vomit. Pride pushed him out of the file. He went back to his old place, cursing in loud and ugly terms. He wrapped himself in the velvet cope as closely and furiously as though he were about to lay his head on the guillotine, threw over the dry cope his wet, white, uhlan's cloak and made a head-rest of the saddle. He had the lance and the straps of the saddle in his hand, the pistols in his belt. He took out his cap and laid it under his cheek so that his head at least would lie on a dry place. Hungry as a homeless dog, he closed his eyes and thrust his head between the pommels of the saddle in order to sleep and not look at the world.

38. "*Siempre Eroica*"

ALMOST six weeks Cedro spent in the saddle, the sling of his lance on his arm, his spurs against the flanks of his horse. He now had an Iberian, a horse as swift as the wind. He received it in Tudela, which he reached on foot, with his saddle. From the instant his regiment crossed over to the right bank of the Ebro and entered its valley, so joyous after the wild mountain wastes, he did not know a moment's rest. He took part in the unparalleled charges of the lancers of the first regiment at Mallen, and at Alagón on the Xalon, a glorious, rapid, wild tributary of the Ebro, flowing into it from the south. He rode in the advance guard of the entire army when, on the 16th of June, it neared Saragossa. He was one of the first to cross the length and breadth of that laboriously nurtured garden, kept moist by numerous canals; he looked into every house in the suburban villages—La Joyosa, Marlofa, Las Casetas, Utebo, Monzalbarba; he was the first, finally, to reach the convent of San Lamberto in Molviedro. From here it was less than three miles to the Aragonese capital. Molviedro, from that moment, became, as it were, the home of the regiment. Here they rested after the hardships of their expeditions, sleeping in the chilly corridors of the convent; here they could hide before the oppressive heat of the day and the sharp cold of the night; from here, they set out upon their hundreds and thousands of expeditions, each of which was damnation. Christopher had already forgotten the number of encounters, skirmishes, pursuits over the smooth, limy roads lined with eucalypti and platans.

He now lived on the sun-baked heights of the Madrid highway, winding through La Muela and Calatayud, and in the valley of the Huerba on the roads passing through Daroca,

above the Royal Canal and across the river, the Ebro, on the marshy, left bank in the Gallego valley and in the sterile, saline mountains, soft with weathered stone and powdery with gypsum. Inasmuch as the small army of General Verdier, with the task of taking Saragossa before it, had no stores whatever, the Vistulian uhlans had to forage for food and fodder for the entire army. Accordingly, day in and day out, divided into small detachments, they slipped out into the mountains at break of day. The rich valley of the Ebro, laden with milk and honey, was completely deserted. Part of the inhabitants had fled to Saragossa, part into the mountains, taking with them all their goods and chattels. One had to look for sheep, cows, and goats in their inaccessible retreats. In the course of those six weeks the uhlans developed instincts of hounds and brigands. Cedro found in himself the soul of some ancestor from the times of Maciek Borkovic. He was, by this time, indifferent to the unpleasantnesses of that occupation. In fact, he discovered in it a peculiar charm, an insolent pride, the joy of tyranny, a healthy laughter at human groans. Every moment of life now passed for him under a loose, impendent rock of horror.

A man encountered in the mountains was an enemy striking at one's heart with a knife. Behind every bush lurked the barrel of a gun, shots fell and bullets whizzed from behind every stone, and every passing shadow foreboded death. But the young soul found its element in just this danger. How many times, trailing cattle, they met with an ambushed band of guerrillas, who noisily fell upon them with glinting knives. They were wild and primitive men, inured to life on a barren soil and to ranging the Pyrenees with contraband. Pierced mercilessly with lances, they would seize hold of the horse's neck and, with the point of their knives, cut the withers of the animal and strike at the heart of the rider. It was then

that Cedro learned what the lance is and how wise were the maxims of his comrade Gaykos. Before the enemy decides upon a leap—a bound of the horse and a levelled spear-head! A squirt of blood, the death groan of the trampled man—and the thing is done.

In these six-week expeditions he had encircled old Cæsaraugusta numerous times and from every direction. He saw it from the eminence of Castellar, from the heights of the table-land of Plasencia, from La Torecilla to the south and, to the east, from the plateau of Val de Osera. His eyes beheld the outlines of countless spires: the lofty peak of the Del Seo Cathedral, the massive trunks of the convents—the Franciscan in the centre of the city, behind the gate called Quemada; St. Joseph's on the right bank of the Huerba; to the south the square of Castillo de la Aljafería, of inquisitional fame; to the west the Capuchin, in front of the Carmen gate; and at the very edge of the river the cupolas and pointed turrets of Nuestra Señora del Pilar.

They had a clear view of the bridge connecting the suburbs of Arcabal with the principal cross-streets which ran through the whole city to the square of Sant' Engracia and of the wide recess shaped like the letter *C*, between the massive black buildings—the Calle de Cosso this, a place whose wide, medial bulge below the Franciscan monastery and the hospital for the insane formed an elongated plaza, its lower outlet leading behind the university building to Puerta del Sol, the upper widening into the market-place and behind the convent of San Juan de las Panales, reaching the river Ebro in a narrow, dwindling street.

They were charmed and entranced by this sullen city. It was not a fort, for its only bulwarks were a low, ten-foot wall and poor gates. They saw the first attack on Saragossa on the 15th of June and the siege of the 2nd of July, the

capture of the suburban heights of Monte Torrero, the taking of the cloister of the Capuchins. They were at the violent storming, defence, and burning of the monastery of St. Joseph.

They met here a courage hitherto unseen, a steel resistance. They understood now that they had before them not officers and soldiers, not a stormy populace dispersing at the first onset of a drilled battalion, but a people transformed into an army by the force of fanaticism. The commander of that huge mass was not appointed by superior powers. There were no "superior powers."

The unanimous and single-voiced command of the mass appointed as leader the strongest, the bravest, the most dogged fighter. If his plan was faulty, ineffectively conducted, feebly executed, his commands poorly given, his charge too soft and weak, if, in short, he did not fight unto death, as the populace willed, he was sentenced summarily, stood under a wall, and pierced through the heart by a volley from his own subordinate band. Thus perished Colonel Pesino, thus perished the commandant of the castle of Cinco-Villas, and others. The fighting bands were not formed into regular divisions. They were cohorts attracted and massed by the genius of the leader. The more marked the power of this genius, the greater the division. The commander of a given division was actually not subordinate to the commander-in-chief, he obeyed the orders handed him from above only in so far as he himself deemed them conducive to the goal. And yet all, on a given occasion, obeyed as one man a leader such as, by the will of the people, Don José Palafox came to be.

The Polish uhlans, standing on the hills and looking at the sullen city, thought of it as of a soul, sentient and familiar. They liked to stand thus, a division of them, and look and look at it. . . . Oftentimes Christopher Cedro would

stop his horse and lose himself in reverie. His heart broke at these thoughts and his hands trembled. A stubborn fury rose in his soul, and his lips uttered a vengeful cry: "You, too, must perish, phantom! You shall not stand in front of us, accursed nightmare! Against drilled, disciplined, orderly phalanxes you place the pride of your will and the power of your lofty anarchy! Ha ha! You must perish!"

When the army undertook the task of bringing forty-six siege-guns, howitzers, and mortars from Pampeluna, in order to begin a formal siege, the regiment of uhlans defended that transport from guerrilla attacks while it was being floated down the Aragon Canal. During that time they had no rest either night or day. They were fording constantly, now to one, now to the other side of the canal. They barred the way of bands which came down from the mountains, fought hand to hand with them in ambush, in rocky fissures and mountain pits. At length the transport was brought to the walls of Saragossa, and the siege was laid in such a way that the city was surrounded from the west and the south—that is, from the river Ebro and Fort Monte Torrero. The eastern portion, with the entire suburbs and the river front, was free.

In the latter part of July, Christopher, because of his knowledge of French, was taken from the ranks into an artillery engineering company which Hupet, captain of lancers, was forming of the more capable uhlans and foot-soldiers. The number of qualified artillerymen in the army was so insignificant that General-Engineer Lacoste, who was to direct the siege work, had but a few officers at his command. The battery entrusted to Hupet stood beneath Monte Torrero. The artillerymen now had the task of constructing the battery. The task was made considerably easier by the great number of irrigating canals dug ages back by the hard-labouring Moors, and by the natural fosses through which

the water-gates of the Royal Canal conducted the water into the gardens. In addition to these channels the locality was drained by the high-walled bed of the river Huerba. The olive-trees stretched to the very walls of the city. By day the inhabitants cut these carefully nursed groves with balls, tore the gardens, razed the summer houses scattered through their midst only to uncover the works of the French and to rout the working men with fire.

Christopher gave up his horse and the excursions, although he did not change his uniform and still belonged to his regiment. He stayed in the canals now and directed a group of Aragonese peasants who, under penalty of death, had to build instruments of death for their countrymen. Bayonet in hand, he warded off almost constant sallies and attacks by the inhabitants or else quelled the revolts of the workmen which burst out in the fosses like exploding mines. From the walls and convent towers poured unceasing balls, rockets, pieces of iron, and stones. At night he studied the art of placing batteries, of constructing breastworks, of cutting embrasures, and grounding cannon.

On the third of August all the cannon boomed forth. On the next day they fired from day-break on the Castillo de la Aljafería, the age-old dungeons of the Inquisition, on the Carmen gate and the Engracia gate. At the same time the Polish sharpshooters set out, on the other side of the river Ebro, from the suburbs of Arcabal. Christopher Cedro stood in a battery opposite the Engracia Convent. Inasmuch as the besiegers expected that the gate would be barricaded with sand-bags, they sought to make breaches on either side of it, in the walls of the convent. The huge convent buildings stood on a small rise and formed an isolated whole. A battalion of the seventieth regiment and the entire first regiment of Polish infantry stood in the entrenchments awaiting the signal.

The men were hungry for battle, for women, for pillage. They trembled with impatience. About eleven o'clock in the morning the convent walls began to fall and to turn into pillars of dust. Captain Bal threw himself instantly into the first breach, to the right of the gate. After him, over the bridge on the river Huerba, started a handful of uhlans. In the frightful heat, through the fire of shots falling like lightning-bolts from embrasures cut in the walls of the convent, they make their way to the fissure. They come face to face with the defenders. They fall on each other like raging beasts. Blood gushes in spouting streams. A wall of dead barricades the entrance. The cloister walls crash and fall. Floors collapse, and from the upper stories hosts of men tumble into the cellars. Beams crush them, falling stoves and walls bury them at once.

From the yawning holes of the fissured walls poured ever new ranks of men in holiday attire. They fell upon the assailants with blind, reckless courage. They were slain with bayonets and pushed into the same grave as the others. The

on a bag and stretched his legs. Not a thought. . . . Where is he and what is he doing? What are those bags and what are they for? The frightful roar of cannon keeps on striking him on the forehead, on the temples. Dreadful, dying groans . . . Where can be he?

Just behind him, marching back and forth in the purple shadow of the wall, was a spare, slender officer, a dark-skinned, dark-haired man, with beautiful eyes. An unsheathed sword was in his hand. Cedro glanced at him with a blood-shot eye and was not sure whether he really saw that man or whether he was merely recalling an incident in which such a man had figured. The officer stopped in front of him and was saying something with an ironical smile. Amid the bursting of shots, the galloping currents of air, the sound of sappers' picks striking against the adjacent walls, amid the howls for help, the mortal outcries and groans—he could not hear.

He jumped to his feet and stood at attention.

"What are you doing here, uhlan with the fitted waist?" the captain shouted in his ear.

"Detailed to the cannon of Captain Hupet . . ."

"I see. You are tired?"

Cedro looked at him with amazement.

"I know you by sight, by hearsay, Mr. Cedro."

Christopher bowed in military fashion.

"We are distantly related. My name is Vyganovski."

A new salvo of platoon fire and a roar of cannon interrupted their conversation. Some moments later Christopher was again sitting on his bag while the officer paced up and down along the wall.

"What do I care about your name, you horned devil. . . ?" Cedro reflected. "Relationships . . ."

He cast an involuntary glance in the direction of the bat-


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tered convent and again saw the wrecked and shattered cellars. Men were crawling out of the wreckage. Their bodies were hung with torn, bloody rags. Their faces were frightful, their eyes looked at him from afar. What dreadful eyes!

"Vyganovski," his lips whispered, "distantly related. . . . Cedro . . . Ha ha! Cedro! There is no Christopher Cedro, my brother. He is gone, my friend, gone quite completely. . . . Oh yes, gone . . ."

He was not allowed to continue his melancholy musing for long. Called back to the business of carrying the bags, he had to take hold of the first sack in line and to carry it in the indescribable heat. On the Place Engracia the bags were being ripped and the sand poured out.

"I wonder," thought Cedro with a smile, running in an endless round, like a horse on a treadmill, "who will be the next to pour this sand back into the bags? Perhaps we ourselves?"

As soon as the barricade was removed from the gate, the soldiers shattered its mammoth jambs and flung open its doors. The forty-fourth regiment fell into the street, the square and the convent courtyards. Those who had not perished in the ruins of the walls now died under the bayonet. They left the buildings of the Convent Engracia only when they no longer held a single living defender.

The entire French force now formed into a column in order to break into the centre of the city and to reach the bridge. From Engracia Place three outlets led in three different directions. The first led westward to the Carmen Place and gate, past the monastery of St. Joseph Del Calzas. To the north stretched the main artery of the city—the street of Sant' Engracia, opening upon Calle del Cosso and, together with the street of St. Giles (from Cosso to the bridge), cutting the city into two almost equal parts. The third exit led to

the east, through gardens and side streets, to the Quemada gate.

The army had to march straight ahead, down Engracia. The sappers were called, dressed in siege-armour and provided with pickaxes. They began to march in a body on the wall which barred the narrow passage. The picks struck noisily into the stone barricade, and at the same instant a veritable hell burst loose upon the assailants. From roofs, from façades, from a few windows and loop-holes, from every story, and, it would seem, from behind every stone, boulders and lumps of iron fell, vats of boiling oil and water splashed. Carbine-fire shot from everywhere, even from the ground, from cellar windows.

The French and Polish divisions struck at the masonry with their bayonets. They jagged and furrowed it, clung to it with their nails and toes, scrambled to the top over the carbines which they stuck in the walls as over steps. As soon as they had moved the top ledge of the barricade, they fell upon the individual stones and tore them away bare-handed in the smoke and fire, amid the crumbling ruins.

Before the Spaniards had time to murder the first ranks, this barricade was shattered with bayonets and transformed into a drift of brick and lime. The frenzied host of conquerors rushed into the narrow mouth of the street like an explosive, like a human missile thrown by some infernal power. Vengeance pushed them onward. Mad, blind fury urged them on with an iron knout. But no sooner did they climb from the pit to the top of the ruined barrier and show themselves in the street than a volley of cannon-fire burst upon them from the depths of the passage. Echoing the deafening peal, the black, windowless structures, the convent walls, the belfries and church spires groaned and rocked on their bases. Grape-shot tore piecemeal the first heads and breasts.



The crimson blood streamed over the bricks into the shallow gutters of the street. The entire length of it was barred by transverse mounds. Torn pavement, plates of marble and porphyry, earth thrown up from the ground formed something resembling huge steps leading down the length of the street.

The plots not occupied by the barricades were ribbed with ditches. Below the first battery showed a second, beyond that a third. The first four side streets to the left of Engracia and the three farther ones running off the right side were barricaded with a solid wall of masonry, more than a story in height. All the doors and windows were choked with stones and beams. An enthusiastic, insane amazement raised the hair on the heads of the invaders. They were to go into that narrow, cloud-reaching gullet. The street seemed like an insignificant fissure between towering walls. A narrow ribbon of fiery blue was but barely visible between cornice and cornice. Such a sight the Napoleonic warriors had not yet seen on this earth. They set their teeth, gripped the barrels of their carbines with a deathly hold, and waited for the word of command. They made one leap at the flaming mouths of the cannon. They reached them. Their eyes fell on living men in those living walls. They saw cold, calm cannoneers loading a new charge. These men did not flee before the onrushing throng. With silent, pale, fearless contempt they defended themselves with their gun swabs. They answered the demand that they surrender by muttering final prayers and dealing deadly blows. Thrown to the ground, they defended themselves with knives drawn from their belts. Dying of a hundred wounds made by the bayonet in a single breast, they tore with their teeth the faces of living and dead, like dogs that, mad with insane devotion, defend their home against attack. The victorious French cohort passed

on, while the pierced and mangled corpses of the defenders hung with outstretched arms, face upward, on the cradles, wheels, and axles of the guns, like the ribboned tatters of a standard.

The first regiment of the Polish infantry and a battalion of the seventieth regiment under the command of Generals Verdier and Lacoste rushed over the first wall and fell upon the second battery. Strewing the street with dead, they had barely passed one of the side streets when a throng of Spaniards swooped upon them from behind a barrier. They now had to fight in all directions and endure the fire which came from above without one moment's respite.

Christopher Cedro found himself in the street of Sant' Engracia under the immediate command of General-Engineer Lacoste. Soon however, the progress of the battle threw him into other groups. Dazed, deaf with the noise, he sped on with the rest as though in a fast sleep, pressing his figure against the walls of the massive buildings. He had crossed the ditches and the living walls of the first battery when he suddenly stumbled into the broken opening of the third little street turning off to the left of Engracia. The *voltigeurs* of the first regiment were still battling here with the Spanish. Cedro joined the fray. The defenders, killed off in the opening, wounded and spiked, dispersed, and shots continued to fall only from the upper windows. One of the older men advised that they skulk along the walls and move imperceptibly up the little street which they had entered through the opening, to the point where it turned. Christopher did what was ordered, along with the rest. His back against the wall, he moved step by step with his finger on the trigger, his eyes watching nervously to see from what direction a shot would fall and hit him. The windows in this entire passage were walled up to half their height, so that here and

there one could foresee a shot when a cap or the muzzle of a gun or a flashing pair of black eyes appeared in an opening.

They came at length to the corner of the street. Their path was perpendicular to the direction of the principal onset. From the point where they now found themselves, a narrow side-street turned off at right angles from the street which they had been following and, running parallel to Sant' Engracia, stretched in the direction of the Franciscan convent. Straining their ears, they heard the sound of a violent uproar at the end of the third side of that square, the side which led back to Engracia. There, running singly, wounded Spaniards still appeared in the street, falling men tottered and dragged themselves about.

Seven casually gathered infantrymen, and with them the uhlan foot-soldier Cedro, rushed blindly into these by-ways. They expected that they would come upon a barricade and take it from the rear. The street was dark and utterly deserted. They walked stealthily, unobserved by anyone. They crept on tiptoe, like foxes, on both sides of the passage, their backs scouring the walls. They reached the corner without loss or hindrance.

Looking round the corner, they saw in the little street—the fourth street from the gate to cross Sant' Engracia, the first from the Franciscan convent—a handful of Spaniards fighting on the barricade. The building which closed the little street and divided it from the bloody main artery was a high and solid structure of brick masonry. Heaped behind the wall lay clavichords, sofas, wardrobes, wagons, piles of every sort of household furniture, and stacks of sand-bags. The defenders, bloody, and wounded for the most part, lay on these and fired without ceasing. Women loaded the fire-arms; children handed them to the men. On the top stood a few young and sound soldiers. These defended the place with carbines. The

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voltigeurs counted this little throng with their eyes. The next moment they rushed out from round the angle of the street and with a cry threw themselves upon the barricade. The defenders saw them and greeted them with a volley of shots before they had time to reach the foot of the barricade. In the same instant the whole street came to life. In all the windows, above and below, heads and guns looked out upon them. Shots rang out and smoke cowed the street. The defenders of the barricade came down from it in a few leaps and clashed with the *voltigeurs*. From the upper halves of the windows old men and haggish old women began to crawl out, brandishing axes and hatchets; fists appeared, gleaming with daggers, and white teeth glinted savagely. The Polish soldiers formed a diminutive square bristling with bayonets. The *voltigeur* standing in the middle pushed a door near which he stood. The halves fell open noisily. They saw before them a narrow hall and a brick stairway leading to an upper story. In the twinkling of an eye the men pushed their entire little square into the hall and pointed all bayonets into the street. Two loaded guns, five, with Cedro for the sixth, did not take the muskets from their chins.

In a few moments a human barrier formed round this hallway. Cedro was at the front of the square; he stood on the threshold and shielded the column. Just outside the threshold, to the left of the doorway and hence from the direction of Sant' Engracia and the still unseized barricade, a tall, black house jutted into the street in a heavy scarp for a distance of perhaps three feet. In this projection was a vertical line of windows, one in each story. There was a window on the ground-floor also, walled up to the middle. In the opening in the upper half of the window, which Cedro could see, for he was directly in line with it and not more than the length of two carbine barrels away, a head appeared at


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frequent intervals. Dense smoke poured from the opening. Grasping the carbine which his comrade had loaded, Christopher took careful aim at that window. At just that moment a white face flashed again in the opening. He pointed his weapon still more carefully and braced himself for the shot. And thus, with the butt at his cheek, he became motionless under the fire of the enemy. He could not pull the trigger. Looking from the murk of that opening, straight into his eyes, were the eyes of an inspired angel, frightful and wondrous, open and staring with exaltation. A storm of black hair over a white face which valour and the frenzy of battle had drawn into a mask of horror. . . .

"How beautiful you are!" mused Cedro, full of flaming joy and admiring rapture, as he aimed between those eyes, riveted so sternly upon him.

His shot rang out. A volley of smoke sooted his face and blinded his eyes for a moment. The smoke fell and the uhlan looked into the yawning hole with powerless eyes. But, lo, from behind the window-frame the white forehead slipped out stealthily and the eyes of the phantom embraced the assailant. A mist of happiness enveloped his face. A smile took possession of his eyes and lips. They stood thus for the twinkling of an eyelid, a moment longer than hundreds of years, facing each other, their souls plunged in each other's eyes. The moment was shorter than the time which it takes to pass the loaded carbine from one hand to another.

A greater and greater throng pressed upon the men imprisoned in the hallway. Seeing before them a veritable host, the soldiers threw into it still another volley of shots, and then, wholly unmindful of what would come next, they slammed the hall door behind them and barred it from within with a huge iron brace. They did not know where they were. They were surrounded by complete darkness. Having noth-



ing to lose, they directed their steps into the interior of the hall. They came upon the brick stairway. Christopher was the first to run up the narrow, twisted, worn-out steps. As he did so, a small door opened somewhere before him. Someone cried out a few steps in front of him. The soldier thrust his bayonet in that direction, but he struck a solid wall. Skulking and spying with all his senses, he followed the rustle of the footsteps which vanished before him in the gloom. His comrades stole on silently. One could hear only their hot, heaving, ill-boding breath. Their bandit eyes pierced the darkness. They were like a unipersonal phantom of death visiting the quiet house. They trailed their hands over the dark, cold walls, looking for doors. The chimney-like staircase opened, on the second floor, upon a small platform. A door led to an enclosed courtyard, round which ran a wooden gallery. They looked out cautiously. Not a soul was to be seen.

Three hens strolled below in the sun, cackling softly and pecking at invisible seedlets in the calmest fashion in the world. On the balcony a green parrot swung in a tall, round cage of red wicker. The sun lay in a fiery, almost yellow sheet on one of the walls and a small part of the tiny courtyard.

It did not seem a safe thing to step from the solid enclosure of the building to this wooden balcony. They went up higher, to the third floor, over a stairway equally tortuous and brick steps equally worn. When they were half-way up this second stairway, they heard a faint rustle at the top. They paused.

All was still. But as soon as the first of their line entered the patch of light falling slantwise from above, a shot fell into them. The leader groaned and without a word, like a bag of sand, slumped to the ground in a sitting posture. The next man jumped over him and stepped upon the landing.

After him the rest, one after the other. A second shot rang out. After it, almost simultaneously, a third. They saw before them several armed men. They were priests. Pistols were still smoking in the hands of these servants of the altar. In the twinkling of an eye three old men fell in their own blood, rattling and tearing the legs of the soldiers with claw-like fingers. The fourth and fifth escaped into a door on the right. Cedro caught one of them. The priest veered suddenly and in one leap stood before the uhlan. He was a man in the prime of life, with a blue-grey face and grey hair, cropped close at the very scalp. The livid glint of a dagger scraped and slid over the barrel of the carbine. As they stood thus, closed breast to breast in the horror and frenzy of mortal combat, their arms raised for a blow, Cedro saw the dreadful black eyes of the other bulging and motionless with vengeance, his teeth white as milk, his nostrils distended with fury. He struck him with his carbine, from below, in the abdomen, with one upward swing of the arms. The priest bent in half and fell slowly backward. Then, wholly unconscious of what he was doing, Christopher swiftly raised his carbine, turned the butt to the ceiling and struck at the groaning breast. The bayonet pierced the body and was imbedded in the floor. The uhlan pulled it out with difficulty and followed the others into the door, shaking his boots and trousers and splashing the blood with which they were drenched in all directions.

"Pullets!" shouted the foremost *voltigeur*.

Looking into the room, they saw perhaps twenty women of varying ages, old and young.

They stood crowded and packed in a dark corner of a large salon as though they were glued together into a solid mass. They looked at the door with lifeless eyes. Before one could say a word, the crowd was broken, torn apart, examined in

the light of the window. The aged and aging were thrown out by their heads, butted and kicked into the adjoining room. They left seven of the youngest. Among these latter Cedro saw the face from the first-floor window. The thought came to him that it was she who ran before him in the darkness. She warned the priests.

He rushed up to her in a leap. He took her in his arms. He locked them with an iron strength. No one tried to take her from him. Now, amid the frightful silence which filled the dark room, one could hear only the groans, sighs, and weeping of the dying. The soldiers closed the two doors. With frenzied haste they barricaded them with tables, chairs, everything which came to hand. For a moment the silence was broken by entreaties, by whining, by whispered prayers for pity, for mercy, by adjurations and sobs. All this ceased when the hard Mazovian fists squeezed the tender throats of the Aragonese maids. The frail, softly nurtured bodies could not resist the felling blow, the legs gave way. The dresses were torn off in a flash. . . .

Cedro stood before the maiden of his choice and looked at her. She was as pale as a ghost. His eyes ran about in lightning glances to see if all his comrades were already disarmed. He could then look at her once more without fear. He saw the same self-illuminated eyes, black yet transparent, like clear bottomless water. She was not more than sixteen. She was slender, almost visible in her diaphanous gown. Her eyes grew stony from the frightful scene which was spread before them. The struggle and tossing of her sisters or cousins crushed her to powder. Her lips fell apart and breathed swiftly. Some sound on the frail lips. . . . Cedro saw that the brain was turning in her head, that her veins were twisting, her scalp breaking. She shook, fluttered, bent her arms. She knitted her legs one over the other, drew her quaking



next still endured, like the embodiment of highest rapture. The lovely *doncella* did not turn round as she entered the door to which she came. She left it wide open.

He forgot that he was unarmed, that he had left his carbine in the room of the six captive ladies. He would look just once to see where she had gone. He would give just one glance. Perhaps those eternal eyes would gleam once more before him, those eyes of life. . . .

He entered the door and took a few more steps. Suddenly he had the sensation that he was fainting, that he had lost consciousness. His eyes grew dim. The door was slammed behind him with a clang. Fingers like claws and talons plunged into his throat. Some twenty hands seized his arms, his legs, his hips, his knees. . . . He was knocked off his feet, caught by the collar and shoulder-bands. Wrenched suddenly, he lost his balance and fell full length on the floor.

Together with him, there fell to the floor and covered him a pile of the old and oldish women who had been thrown out the door. They attacked him treacherously. He lay now under a literal stack of ruins and sought for a moment to catch a whole breath and to form some semblance of a thought. In the mean while all those hard, fleshless paws, those bony, crooked knuckles, pushed into him like nails, like steel hooks, tore him like tongs.

"Nothing other than a reprisal for those other ladies," he thought heavily, shaking with laughter. "But, matrons. . . . I am not capable . . ."

A patter of soft pantofles . . . The corpselike mummies whisper, one above another, whisper, whisper. . . . A sound hisses, whistles, rattles between their decaying teeth. More and more intensely, more and more passionately, they mumble that word. . . .

He tried to move to one side, to the other. . . . It was

not to be even thought of! His arms were stretched out and, it seemed, nailed to the floor. Ten aunts held each with all their might.

"How is this?" he began to mutter to them in Polish; "am I alone to . . . ? Am I to make atonement, amiable grandams? . . . Woe is me!"

He collected all his strength, took a long, full breath, and tore himself violently from his place. He moved the haggish mound from its foundations. A few fell off the top. They began to run about still more frantically, to whisper, and to throw themselves once more on the heap. Suddenly some frightful paw, dry, with iron joints which pierced like claws, seized him by the throat. It found the windpipe and squeezed it. Flakes of blood rushed into his eyes and fire burst out in his skull. With one final effort he bent his neck, thrust his head forward to catch his breath, and buried his teeth in the veins and tendons of the hand which was throttling him. He gripped it with all his might and clenched his jaws. He gave it a violent tug. A cry rang out. The hand let go. He then began to shout at the top of his voice:

"Help! This way! Help, help!"

About his breast, his head, his neck, a flutter of hands, whispers, noise.

They pluck him, pinch him, tear him with their claws. They are passing something from hand to hand, snatching it from each other with a throaty cackle.

He sees a dagger. A moment of silence. All are wheezing on top of him in a panting whistle. A hand is slipping upward over his breast. It searches, meditates. . . . It stops over the heart.

The pointed edge pushed lightly into the coat, watching the pulsing heart-beat. He opened his horrified eyes. . . . His blood froze within him. Wondrous eyes were above him.



They looked into his. The half-open lips panted heavily, as in death. He recognized her only then. . . . Was it she who was lying upon him?

"How I love you!" he whispered, filling his lungs with air.

In the same instant, without thinking of anything, he lifted his head, exerted all his strength, and pressed his mouth to the flaming lips of the girl. The dagger in the hand of the beauty tottered, rocked, wavered. Cedro in that moment wrenched free his right arm. He tore it from the talons of the old hags, pulled his fingers from the mass of hooks and screws, bent his elbow with a colossal effort, and drew his hand towards him. For a moment he prepared the blow. He dealt it from below into the entire layer of feminine dry-rot that lay upon him. A moment later he slipped his hand between his body and the body of the girl in order to wrest the dangerous weapon from her hand. But it was not the dagger his hand encountered. He forgot his impending death, the dagger on his heart. The lovely maid of Aragon threw herself upward in the most violent of virginal recoils. Some other, more experienced hand seized the poniard at that moment.

But just then the room was shaken by the clatter of a broken door. A thudding sound of feet! Frightful cries . . . In a flash, a stream of blood squirted on the carpets of the floor. The *voltigeurs* were rushing in one by one. Seeing their companion on the floor and thinking that he had been killed, they made the women pay. Not to spend too much time, they caught the old hags before they could rise from the ground, one after another, two men each, by the head, by the legs, and swung them straight out the door, over the rail of the balcony, into the courtyard two floors below.

Cedro lay on the ground for still quite a while. At length



he lifted himself like a man heavily drunk. His head was a swimming muddle; small, jumping flames filled his eyes. He picked himself up with laborious toil, straightened his back, stretched his arms, put on his cap. As soon as he was on his feet and had looked round, he ran post-haste for his carbine, which he had left in the adjoining room. Returning with his fire-arm to his companions, he saw his lovely young lady in the hands of one of the soldiers.

He came up to the man and, standing but a step away, said with all his heart: "Brother, I charge you—let her go!"

The other had no thought of letting go. He only winked slyly at his other comrades to pull the uhlan away and take him with them.

But Cedro laid his hand upon the man's shoulder and said straight into his eyes: "I tell you a second time—let her go!"

"You may as well know, you noodle, that I won't let her go! You may as well know it! 'Brother, I charge you—' Our theatrical comedian. . . . You had enough time. . . . Now it's my turn!"

Cedro pulled his pistol from his belt and, placing the muzzle between the man's eyes, said in a single breath: "Now!"

"You blinking owl! Here I save you from a disgraceful death, rip up half a dozen hags for you with my bayonet, and you grudge me the girl!"

"I do!"

"I don't have a friend in the regiment if you live to see this evening. . . ."

"Will you let her go, you cur?"

"There is no justice on earth if you get away with this! What do you say to this, comrades?"

The Spanish girl slipped out of the hands of the *vol-tigreur*. Her trembling hands touching chairs, windows, doors,

she was stealing away in some direction. The men looked at each other with frightful eyes. They were silent.

"Perhaps we had better go," one of them said at length.

"Yes, let's go," said another.

Christopher was straightening his coat, about to leave the room.

"Listen here, sir rider, you keep away from us! You're going by yourself—"

"Yes, by myself. . . ."

"Well, better not. . . . We are foot-soldiers; what are you doing with us?"

"Good, good. . . ."

"Going from house to house after plunder, are you? The knight!"

"I am marching under orders, just like you."

"Why do you want to walk with us?"

"For such a one as goes round without command—a bullet in the head."

"That's right—a bullet in the head!" shouted another.

"Shoot then, you villain!" cried Cedro.

"Better not give that command again. . . ."

"Let's go, friends."

"And you keep away from us!"

"The cavalier! . . ."

"The horseman!"

"The French poodle!"

"The gallant!"

"The count!"

"Wait till it's out among the lancers how hundred-year-old dames were sticking you over the ribs on the floor and you couldn't do a thing about it. . . ."

"They'd have fixed you nicely if it hadn't been for me. . . ."



"Who knows what they would have done with him?"

They set off in the direction from which they had come. Cedro had no thought of going with them. He seated himself in the frame of a window and looked mindlessly at the cooling bodies of the old women, at the pools of blood, at the broken furniture.

He believed that he was debating at this moment what to do further. In reality he was dreaming. He was in a state of half-sleep, half-waking. He saw and heard more and more indistinctly. . . . He was wakened by a noisy clatter. Far off somewhere doors were being shattered, barricades of cabinets and tables overthrown. The *voltigeurs* were returning hastily, crying at Christopher: "A mob of them is coming upon us!"

"They broke through the door downstairs!"

"A whole band!"

"They're coming. . . ."

All ran out on the balcony surrounding the courtyard. Walking half-way round it, they came upon a stairway wider than the one by which they had stolen into the house. Carefully, alert to everything, they began to walk down these stairs. Reaching the second floor, they leaned over the balustrade and saw a narrow vaulted hallway. At the end of this hall was an iron-bound door, closed with a bar of iron and barricaded completely with bags of wool, bags of sand, stones, ironware, and every sort of rubbish. On the other side, beyond this door, raged the battle. They listened for a moment to its frenzied sounds. . . . It was quite plain to them that this door must give directly on the street of Sant' Engracia. In breathless haste they began to remove the stones, to pull away the bags, to move the furniture.

They were just about to lift the iron bar and to open the gate when *voltigeur* Krzos said in a whisper: "Well, you

know, boys, now it's either our sudden death or our great renown! For you must know that outside this door is the main force of the Spaniards. I figure that we'll come out right into the centre, between two barricades. . . . But there's no other place to go. They're coming up behind us, and in another moment they'll be here. And when they see what a pretty mess we've cooked for them, what we've done to their aunts, what mischief we've played with their cousins . . ."

"Clear the door!"

"Wait, wait, just one moment!" cried Cedro, who was following them down the stairs.

As he was coming down, the last and at some distance from the group, he saw to the right of him a small door opening into a room on the second floor. He opened it and hurriedly called his companions.

"What's there?" they called.

"What does he want?"

"The snipe! Scipio Africanus Minor . . ."

"See how you can fire at them from here!" Cedro was calling.

"What do you know about where one can fire from? . . ."

"Blondy!"

Nevertheless they ran up to him. They found in the rather small room which they entered a dozen or more slain Spanish soldiers. They lay on the floor and on the chairs and tables. They had been brought here, it would seem, from the street, heavily wounded in the outdoor battle, thrown down hastily, and then forgotten in the excitement of the fight. They lay thrown on the back or on the face. They seemed to have crawled, in their dying agony, in all directions, like creeping crayfish, and had finally expired one after another in the close, stony room. Now, after letting out floods of coagulated blood, they were sleeping, pale and haggard,



they began to fire into the Spaniards as at a target, without a miss. They were noticed at once from the tower of the convent, from the barricade, and by the French-Polish ranks. The battle became more vehement. Balls began to whistle about their heads and to tear the stone framework of the windows. One of these hit the soldier Zielinski on the temple. He fell backward and threw out his arms. For several moments his legs violently kicked the wall. Then he sighed and grew still.

Cedro had no access to the windows. He began to walk among the bodies, not shunning their sight, but almost not seeing them. He was by now wholly indifferent to the colour of blood, to the shape of a wound, to the picture of death. He was constantly asking himself a certain question. An invincible boredom was trailing after him, tangling his feet, chaining them, binding his hands.

The question he was asking himself was where at that moment was the lovely *doncella*? Where was she? He did not even dream of how he might speak to her, of how he might see her. . . . Only to get the knowledge that she was. Without being in the least aware of it he inclined in desire to one thing only: to end all this business once and for all, to—blast it all!—go, at length, to sleep. To fall on one's face among these dead and to rest for ever and ever. He felt that in his memory, under its iron lid, burnt all the things which he had seen, that unceasingly in the soft coils of the brain all of life's pictures were being graved as by the ruthless burin of an engraver drawing on hard copper. Happily there is no time, and so they are not apparent. To fall on his face and to rot, just like those who were lying there. To rot in such a way that all his thoughts might perish and rot with him, all those secret, treacherous thoughts, cowardly and desperate, thoughts not at all soldierly, but truly womanish, girl-

ish, puerile. Perhaps that sly and silent treadmill in his brain would cease! Why did she not pierce him through with the dagger, to the ground, why did she not push it in to the hilt? Why didn't she plunge it in and kill him manfully, as he had killed the old priest? So that the deaf and dumb floor would have had to ring back: "You have done your part!"

He shivered and looked round.

"Here, you—uhlan!" one of the others shouted just over his ear.

"What's that?"

"I'll go to see what's happening from the court side or they'll come in here on us and choke us like a nest of mice. And aim well, for we're shooting our last powder!"

Christopher took the loaded carbine from the man's hands and began to fire furiously into the crowd. This helped him to forget the preceding moments. His head was full of sand and smoke, his lips of a taste as of centaury. A tiny shred, a scrap of foolish knowledge of how to load the fire-arm, how to hold it, how to aim, and how to pull the trigger, now constituted all his mind. He aimed accurately and with remarkable effectiveness.

In the mean while the *voltigeur* Krzos slipped out upon the stairs and vanished in their gloom. Cedro had not fired five shots when the other ran in on tiptoe and announced that the Spaniards were in the courtyard.

"Downstairs!" he said, seizing the carbine of their killed comrade.

"Let's run!"

All went out on tiptoe and returned to the balcony on the third floor. True enough, from the bottom of the courtyard came the clatter of the wooden clogs of the Aragonese. Several men were circling about the little yard, armed with small carbines. They were noisily looking at the bodies of the



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women thrown out over the balustrade of the upper balcony. Three of them fell immediately from the well-aimed shots of the Poles; the others rushed up the staircase in silence. One could hear the clatter of their wooden shoes on the steps. They appeared in the door, then on the balcony of the third floor. Their dishevelled heads were wrapped in bloody rags. In leaps, in feline bounds, they ran round the wooden balcony. Howling and whistling, they charged upon the *voltigeurs*. A raging fray began in the door leading to the main stairs. They closed in fratricidal battle, breast to breast. The carbines fell away. With naked fist! Cedro caught the gleam of a Toledo blade. In the same instant Krzos fell to the ground as though struck by lightning. The back of his head struck against the stone threshold and he did not move a muscle. There were three Spaniards. They perished more swiftly than they had come. Two were thrown over the balustrade, in the same manner as their countrywomen; the third, his head mashed with carbine blows, changed, in the course of a few seconds, into a mass of gory meat. The Poles were now but five. Their ammunition was gone. Spaniards were entering the yard.

"Now, brothers! This is no laughing matter!"

"Get to work!"

"Open the door!"

With wide steps, a wild song on their lips, they descended the stairs. They righted their cartridge-boxes, their belts, their leather trappings. They tilted their caps. They tightened the buckles under their chins. Each helped the other straighten the black crest on his cap.

"You, there, uhlan, get into the middle."

"Leave me alone! I am going by myself!"

"Come here into the middle! Do as I tell you, I'm leader here!" said the nearest man.



a third knelt down as though cut off his feet with a scythe. Driven by frigid terror, half his cap torn off, bleeding in ten places from contusions, blind with powder and excitement, Cedro was descending from the barricade in huge strides, stepping over bags, bodies, rubbish,—no longer alone, but with the entire host of victors. A wild song was all about him. . . . He had been seen on the crest of the contested barrier by the entire column. They pointed him out with their swords as they pressed on, crushing and chasing the Spaniards to the next battery, which was located at the outlet of Engracia, at the point where it ended in the Cosso, an elongated plaza, white with the glaring sun.

At the newly-gained position Sant' Engracia narrowed to a mere crevice. On the right towered the walls of the hospital, on the left the huge black walls of the Franciscan convent. The tower seemed to bend over this murky pass. The Spanish host which had defended the barricade did not retreat at once into this passage, but, separating into two divisions, instantly seized the two convents—that of the Virgins of Jerusalem and the Franciscan. Cedro, with a band of his comrades, fell upon the first of these. The gates and posterns were barricaded, but soon gave way. The Spaniards were slain with the bayonet at the entrance of the church, in its naves and transepts, in the porch and in the corridors of the cloister. When Christopher came into the main building, which constituted the living quarters of the nuns, these places were already wholly subdued. The long, endless, tortuous corridors from which, to right and left, one entered the cells of the nuns were completely empty. Darkness and a dreary stillness overlay them. The clatter of a footstep resounded as though in a well. Christopher was mortally weary.

He longed at any price to get sleep, if only for a moment. He was just thinking of entering one of these cells, stretching

himself there under the wall, and pretending that he was dead, when suddenly, a few steps in front of him, at the point where the passage entered the stairway to the next story, he heard the cry: "*Qui vive?*"

He gave the watchword. From the thick gloom, into the light of the semicircular window of old, over-burnished glass, came an officer with unsheathed sword. Cedro bent towards him and recognized him at once.

"Oh, it's this Vyganovski again. . . . Cousin," he thought with displeasure.

The captain gazed at him with an ironical little smile and scanned him from head to foot. Finally he said: "I saw your worth on the barricade."

"That may be."

"Splendid work!"

"I got there by chance, actually against my will."

"Better and better."

"Those who seized it have perished. Eternal glory to them! They dragged me out there."

"As for the glory—well, yes. A truly enviable modesty! But louder than words, than writing on paper, on parchment, and, let us say, on sandstone, speak these proud red spots on the breeches and boots. You are distinguishing yourself, Mr. Cedro, in no inconsiderable manner. You are whacking the Celtiberians with a thundering vim. If only now you order a thousand masses with the monks at Burgos, you will make a very devil of a Cid! I like you."

"Yes, I have murdered more than one man today," said Cedro looking dully into the other's eyes.

"You've done very beautifully, my fine lad."

"Especially one whom I killed with my own hands—"

"Ha ha! That's why we have war—so that all true men may have the opportunity to murder their enemies to their

hearts' desire. Your reward will not fail you. I'll see to that. However, guard against the fate of Hamilcar at Saguntum, for such things, too, happen in war."

Cedro was rudely silent.

"Why do you not go on distinguishing yourself in the arena? Beware, as of death, of letting the laurel-branch from your hand, if only for an instant! Another will seize it, and fame does not wait for the tardy. You must keep pace with its flight. Ah, perhaps it's the pullets? What? Tell me openly. . . . Soldier understands soldier as one chorus-girl understands another. There is here, I'll tell you privately, a most splendid choice of nuns. They are so appetizing that all who live must kneel! For, you see, they are ascetics. Denial, languishment, dreams—you catch my meaning? Virgins of Jerusalem . . . I have seen them with my own eyes. Come, I will show you a whole bouquet. Choose whatever your heart dictates. There is only one unpleasantness: not a single blonde. No, not if you were to die for for one!"

They were ascending a stairway made of huge, flat slabs. For a long time they followed a dark corridor, over a wooden floor, then turned into another. Christopher's ears caught the violent rattle of a drum, beating to a measure unfamiliar to him. Soon they found themselves before the oaken door of a large refectory. A number of grenadiers stood here on guard. They opened the door before the captain, smiling roguishly as they did so. Vyganovski walked first to make way for the uhlan. When they had cut through the throng, which stood in a compact circle, Christopher saw some fifty or sixty naked women dancing to the blare of copper pans and kettles struck with pokers. Under the blows of butts and bayonets they pranced quite nimbly.

"The dear little sisters!" Vyganovski whispered, smacking his lips. "Not all, but the most part. I shouldn't say that they

“Some are mine, some are French.”

“If I had command,” Cedro began to mumble with difficulty, catching his breath and groping for words, “if it were I—I’d have these rascals shot down, I’d— Dear God—this is—I’d hang them, like dogs!”

“Speak, my dear youth, speak openly. I should like to draw your attention to one thing, however; this, my dear, is war, and not manœuvres on the Field of Mars under the eye of one’s fiancée in a sky-blue sash. You are, I flatter myself, for the first time at the taking of a city—”

“Yes.”

“Just as I supposed.”

“How does one suppose that?” Cedro asked loftily, an icy smile on his lips.

“I have lived through many heated sieges, but never, I must confess, through a madder one. Not in the Italian campaigns, from beginning to end, or in the Austrian marches. I can assure you on the basis of many years’ experience that wholesale rape hastens capitulation far more effectively than bombardment with batteries, and, moreover, has this good side, that it saves both parties much human material. Silently yet irrevocably it strikes the weapon from the hands of fathers, husbands, brothers, and fiancés, shields the soldiers from grape-shot, and ensures capitulation. Besides, what do you wish? Those who march to certain death, to a vile soldier’s grave in the gutter, on the manure-heap, in cellars and common ditches, deserve something for it from those who live. They deserve this one moment before death. . . . And so I prefer to see my men here in the cells than to have them torn by balls or themselves giving battle and slaughtering without mercy. I vouch to you that the next house will surrender to us of its own free will when the news of what we’ve done here reaches its maidens. But the most important thing is that

the fingers of the left hand with the fingers of the right. He did this with unction, with calmness and care, as though he were carrying out the provisions of a ritual. His lips were twisted exactly like the lips of the nun. . . .

A moment later he straightened up, made two steps backward, drew his sword, and presented arms before the dead body. They went out of the cell.

Vyganovski marched forward with long steps, speaking quickly and indifferently: "She was attacked by five or six of them. There, in an angle of the corridor. I saw it. . . ."

"And you didn't defend her?" Cedro threw the word into his face like a gauntlet.

The other made a gesture of denial. After a moment he continued: "She escaped to her cell. She locked the door. It took them quite a while to force it. At length they wrenched the hinges off along with the door. They fell upon her and tore off her garments. But, lo, a sudden obstacle. . . . The deuce! Ha ha—beneath the lovely breast a sudden obstacle! Everything overcome except one tiny detail! Exactly like Saragossa—already taken, already occupied, already put into chains. 'Now, slave,' we shout, 'we are going to enjoy you!' Ha ha . . . Here you are! Ha ha . . . Here you are—a corpse. Eat it, tear it, you scurvy fox, eat it to your health!"

He stood in the corridor, as white as a corpse himself, and whispered in an ecstatic trance: "Oh nun, nun! If I had been the first ruler of the tribe which had given you birth, I would have named for you my city, my country, the whole earth! I would make of your figure the nation's coat of arms, the nation's seal. I would order my armies to march before your body with unfurled standards. . . ."

Cedro, whom the words of the officer wearied and bored, looked at him with drowsy, faded eyes and barely saw him in the half-gloom.

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"May I lie down here?" he said, interrupting the stream of the captain's generous utterance.

Vyganovski awoke and looked about him. He pushed a door on the left and entered a cell, entirely empty and as small as the one occupied by the suicide.

"Lie down, little dormouse, and sleep!" he said, pointing to the bed.

"My captain, if I judge correctly, has nothing in him of the dour hardness of Scipio Africanus," said Cedro with gentle irony, making for the bed.

At the same moment he recalled that he himself had that day been called Scipio the Younger by someone.

He was about to throw at Vyganovski all the other epithets—poodle, horseman, blond—but he was no longer sure whether he was really looking at the captain or only dreaming of him.

"I have nothing in me of any Scipio. I am dust and ashes. . . ."

"Then sleep," muttered Cedro.

"No, I'll just sit here awhile. I'll wake you in a quarter of an hour, when I'll be leaving this building with my company."

Christopher, the moment his head touched the pillow, began to snore loud enough to rouse echoes in the entire convent. It seemed to him that he had only just closed his eyelids when the door was assailed by violent blows, and the soldiers, with obstreperous racket, began to call Captain Vyganovski to his task. Cedro woke up as instantly as he had fallen asleep. He listened for a few moments to the roar of musketry, to the raucous noises of battle. The captain sat in a chair in the same position, his face turned to the window. He did not seem to hear the cries calling him to battle. He had taken off his cap and still held it in his hand. His face now

seemed much more thin and wasted. He was exceedingly handsome.

A dry, bony forehead, a long, slender nose, a carefully kept moustache, attracted Christopher's involuntary gaze. The motionless eyes of the captain were overlaid with mist. . . .

Cedro shook himself and rose from the bed, stronger and haler in soul.

"Have you had enough?" asked Vyganovski, without turning his head.

"Yes."

"Let's go, then."

"I'm ready."

In front of the convent, in its trampled gardens, stood columns of soldiery, ready for fresh action. The gate was flung open. The files debouched into Sant' Engracia in an iron step.

At a corner building, on the right side of the street, they saw a number of their comrades forcing a door. No one knew what this building was. The gates were powerful, like those of a castle, iron-bound, with frightful bolts and hasps; the walls were thick, the windows barred. The new-comers from the convent lent the besiegers their powerful arm. They rolled up one of the seized cannon and placed its muzzle a few feet from the entrance door. The gun fired into the gate once, twice, three times. The stone framework of the turrets cracked, caved in, and at length gave way, together with the door. The assailants fell upon the sloping surface of the door and crawled over the top into the dark interior. They saw before them a vast hall, with a wide marble stairway at the farther end. Half of the hallway was lumbered with bags of earth. They squeezed through, one by one, and began to remove the barrier. Not a soul hindered them in this work. They thought at first that this building would not be de-

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fended at all. But as soon as a large number of *voltigeurs* had made its way into the hall and started for the stairs, there fell upon them a volley of hand-grenades, thrown from behind the balustrade of the stairway leading to the second story; and bombs, dropped from above, began to crack against the edges of the stairs. Their frightful glare broke the half-darkness; the crackling of shells breaking against the naked walls drowned the groans of the injured men. A crashing din consumed all. Bodies tossed over the steps of white Carrara marble, writhing in mortal spasms. Streams of blood flowed over the stairs like squirming, crimson snakes.

Those coming in from the outside were greeted by this sight. They instantly rushed up the staircase, taking the flight in furious leaps, jumping over the wounded. They reached the upper floor. There, in the long corridor, an out-thrust row of gun-barrels awaited them. A crash of shots, smoke, gleams of fire . . . the corridor of the second floor was seized. It was seized, but at a heavy price. Soldiers strewed the stairs and floor, wounded were dying under the trampling blows of heels. In dark corners, in the casements of the barred windows, men were throttling each other with their hands, stabbing each other with knives. At length the maddened assailants reached the doors of the cells which lined the corridor to right and left. The defenders escaped to the third floor. The men supposed that this was another convent. They opened sixty or seventy cells with hammers and iron bars. In a flash the beings imprisoned there rushed out into the hall. A horrible din and uproar filled the interior of the building.

Some of the released were naked; others had chains on their wrists; still others were dressed in rags, sheets, tatters. All had shaved heads.

When Vyganovski came up the stairs with Cedro, he saw

before him, in the coils and clouds of powder-smoke, two men in rags, with white skulls, who had seized each other by the throat and had plunged their teeth into each other's flesh. They had just fallen to the ground. Now one, now the other was on top. They were tearing each other with their jaws like mad dogs. Their naked arms, knees, thighs, bellies, shoulders, necks, flew about, trembling and quivering. They tore the living blood from each other with their teeth, they pressed each other with their knees, ripped each other with the sharp points of their claws; they clung to each other so frightfully that they seemed to be one body with two heads, many arms and legs. The blows of their fists doubled, tripled, multiplied a hundredfold. They tortured each other, striking skull against skull with a cackling giggle of venomous malignity. One heard a cracking of bones and a throaty rattle, a cracking of bones and a rattle. . . . At length one of them remained on top for a longer while. The other rattled beneath him. Only his head still strained to lift itself, and the neck continued to brace itself for a blow. But the strangler would no longer surrender his advantage. His bloody frenzy did not cease for one moment, even when the white, bruised skull of the victim drooped powerlessly into a pool of blood. He sucked his gushing wounds, raised the lids of his eyes, and stared into them, looked to the bottom; he watched with his hands for each of the man's last breaths and caught them instantly, while they were still in the windpipe. At length he dealt the man a final blow. He spat for the last time into the powerless mouth. He rose. He passed the strange meat of his eyes, the hell of his leer, over the row of astounded soldiers. He saw them now. A laugh broke from his lips, a howl, a sob, a titter. . . . He lifted his shoulders and like a joyous lion leaped from above into the midst of the crowd. He caught by the beard the officer walking in the third file, the soldier

next to him by the throat, and, roaring with bliss, his bared teeth foaming with a froth of happiness, died on the pointed bayonets.

There now burst from the corridor, like leaves driven by the wind, dancers, declaimers, singers, orators, thoughtful men, indifferent men, men blind with frenzy, likenesses of dogs crouching for a spring, and likenesses of felled trees which a fungous rust of indifference seemed to have covered and consumed, men without faces and with frenzied eyes, others with hideous faces which had no eyes, horrible chimeras in women's forms, frightful creatures with the eyes of wolves and tritons, with chains on their arms and in jackets with the sleeves tied in the back. This mob came out to meet the soldiers and barred their way. The roar of beasts, the voices of storms, the groans of the wind in a sylvan wilderness and the night-song of the sea lashed into frenzy by the new moon, the cry of the deepest pain of birds and the laughter of happiness evoked from nothingness by a musical instrument, tears over an empty cradle and the euphoric hymn of the soul gazing into the open heaven—all this burst at the new-comers from this multitude. From the midst of it now came a giant old man in a bloody sheet, a whole head taller than the rest, naked, his head covered with a garland made of a single branch of cypress, his arms outstretched. He saw no one. He was singing some despairing, hollow song the words of which were lost completely in the chaos of smoke, in the din of shots and the groans of the dying. He came down like a genius, like a ruler or a prophet with his cry on his lips.

At the same moment a small, black, nimble ape-man, in homespun little trunks and without a shirt, climbed furtively over the balustrade and winked at everybody; with a rattling laugh of such cunning, such happiness as though he had at length, at this moment, tricked the whole human race, he

gave a long whistle and leaped down, his shaved skull foremost. Before they had time to see how he was shattered there and how he dispersed in a bloody fountain at the entrance door, another had drawn the attention of the moving spectators. A muscular and, to outward view, entirely healthy man, lurking by the wall, fell upon a soldier killed a moment before, seized his carbine in his left hand, and threw himself like a flash into the mass of insane men. He began to bayonet them with lightning blows, to mash the shaved heads with the breech of the musket. At a given sign the soldiers levelled their arms at him. When he fell, torn by the bullets, they pushed through the lunatics and glided up to the third story—in pursuit of the sane. They were on the marble platform of the landing when, from the third-floor corridor, there came the roar of a chorus a hundred times more lively than that of the second. The soldiers stopped.

The Spaniards, wishing, apparently, to form a new barrier between themselves and the assailants, opened the cells of the insane women. The black cavern began to disgorge a tangled wall of monsters. At the head came a ghastly fiend with grey and matted hair, with bulging eyes, with a husky cry in her throat at sight of the young soldiers. The gnarled fingers of her crooked hands crept over the wall. The toothless mouth was open, the naked breast breathed swiftly. The wall rolling behind her seethed and bubbled. A whisper in it, a clapping of hands, spasmodic jerks, a whinnying, a barking as of dogs, squeaks, as if of mares capering over a field, a song of joy, a piercing cry of a hundred words uttered in one breath. A laughter in this throng, a laughter which raised the hair on one's head, a laughter more dreadful than the sight of death.

The soldiers were frightened and fled. Taking a defensive position on the second floor, they waited. The women crept



downstairs furtively, silently. Some of them, howling like hyenas, jumped to the main door of the hospital; others fell into the corridor of the second floor. Cast off by the bayonets of the soldiers, they gratified their lusts with the madmen.

Captain Vyganovski took advantage of the moment when the mad host came down from the upper stairway and once more rushed upstairs with his company. The third-floor corridor became the scene of a frightful battle. The Spaniards locked themselves in the rooms of the women, in the cells of the furies only just given their liberty. Through the tiny wickets in the iron-bound doors, which were provided with excellent locks, they smote the assailants with unerring shots. They sat as in a fortress. The contingent of French, which came from below to the aid of the Poles, would, it seemed, sink its teeth in the wall in its powerless fury. In vain they shot through the little windows in the doors; the Spanish soldier hid just below, close to the door. He calmly loaded his carbine, thrust out the barrel, and took aim, remaining unseen all the while. The besiegers brought iron bars, parts of cannon, cleaning-rods, beams, and poles. They began to batter the doors with the rams, one by one. The soldiers changed into frenzied catapults. The doors groaned, transformed themselves into splinters and shavings. Even then the shots continued. The beleaguered Spaniards were finally taken one by one, alive. The soldiers snatched them from each other and passed them from hand to hand. They were bayoneted, crushed with butts, annihilated in these dens, to a man.

Their bodies were shredded with bayonets, their faces mangled, their chests crushed underfoot. Their own belts were twined about their throats. The belts were then fastened to the grating of the doors, and the men were choked by several pairs of hands pulling them by the feet. The hard of neck, the obstinate, the proud, those who shouted their "Long

live Ferdinand VII," were finished with the bare hands.

The remainder of the defenders, those of more timid nature, had run up a side stairway to the garrets of the hospital. There the assailants started a fire. Piles of straw were ignited on the stairs leading to the attic. When the fire began to spread, the rest of the Spaniards jumped out upon the bayonets or met their death in the flames.

Having mastered the upper part of the building in this fashion, the men put out the fire and began to move to the door. They drove the more obedient of the madmen and women into a heap, to chase them from the city and to lock them in the buildings of Monte Torrero. The insane throng dispersed in all directions. Some refused to leave their cells, others fought with the soldiers like the most valiant veterans. The hideous battle with the frenzied hags drove the escorting soldiers to despair. Through the midst of this bedlam, these monstrous scenes, these murders and obscene sights, through this fiendish mob, moved Cedro, making his way down the stairs. He finally reached the door and stopped to look up. His eyes sought Captain Vyganovski.

At that moment, behind the driven band of men and women, came the tall man in the huge wreath of cypress-leaves. His eyes, raised to the ceiling, still saw nothing. Not a single scene. . . . The bare feet waded up to the ankles in the blood congealed on the stairs, slipped and trampled on the dead, cold bodies. The bare arms came out from beneath the blood-greased sheet and stretched upward. In the cruel face, a face as removed from human expression as the visage of a stone, in the frightful, cold mask, shone but one sole, unmeasured, inward lust. Wrong had been carving it for years, as industriously as the sleepless work of a volcano fashions the form of its crater. He sang, or rather called, from the depths of his spirit, from all the powers of his heart,

from his whole breast, cried into space in the words of the psalm: "*Quis dabit mihi pennas, sicut colom bæ? . . . Et volabo et requiescam. . . .*"

It was a cry so eloquent that it seemed impossible to the listener that the call should not bring forth an instant answer. Again the voice: "*Quis dabit mihi pennas, sicut colom bæ? . . .*"

He passed. Seeing not the way, the walls, the street, the world, the men who stabbed him, driving him with bayonets and clubs, the tall old man stepped into the maw of Sant' Engracia and disappeared, together with his companions. From afar, from the darkness littered with bodies and filled with powder smoke, still came his superhuman song: "*Et volabo et requiescam. . . .*"

At length Vyganovski came down the stairs. When they met at the door, Cedro took his hand. He pressed it to his breast without knowing that he did so. The captain looked at him askance, distrustfully, half sardonically, as was his wont. Suddenly he gave a short, hidden, tearless sob. He covered it with a forced cough, loud and artificial. It was a thing which befell him frequently, it seemed, for he collected himself at once. He said something very rakish and spicy. . . .

Night was falling on the boiling city.

The Franciscan convent, which the Polish division had seized except for the tower where the Spaniards still held their own and hurled hand-grenades at the passing soldiers, was to serve as a gathering-point, a hospital, and a place of rest. In the captured street of Sant' Engracia fires were kept burning in an unbroken row from the earliest twilight. Sentries were posted at close intervals and round all the gained points. Cedro found himself in the colonnade of the cloister, giving out on the gardens. Long, wide benches of hewn stone

stood here along the wall. The soldiers stretched their weary bodies in this space of monastic siestas. . . .

They longed now for sleep and rest.

Fire burned in the old Franciscan minster. Meat was crackling on spits. Old, rosy wine, the delight of the monks, circled round in sacred, golden goblets. Song praising power and superior strength, song bidding one push and trample all that which falls without strength, rang through the dark corridors, in the empty cells, and under the hollow cupola of the church.

About midnight the last echoes of conversation died in the convent. The soldiers, wrapped in their cloaks, slept back to back across the whole length of the columned ambulatory. It was a hard and truly stony sleep. Cedro lay with the rest, but he did not sleep.

At the end of the gallery, at the entrance of the garden, burned a large bonfire. Long streaks of mobile flame threw uncertain gleams into the garden. The snoring of the bodies littering the entire gallery was unbearable. It seemed to Christopher, as soon as his thoughts began to wander away from this place, that these were corpses whose killing had been left unfinished and whose death-rattles he now heard beside him. He shuddered and wrapped himself in his cloak in furious anger. But, though he shut his eyes, he could not shut off the thoughts which stormed his mind. They would rise tomorrow from this monstrous sleep to further deeds of slaughter or to an eternal rest in the canals and gutters of the city. What dream dreams this recumbent multitude? And, lo, he saw the dream of the mob, striding before it in the dark angles of the ceiling. He saw, with sober eyes, flaming, contorted coils of agony writhing over narrow stairs which oozed with blood. . . .

And now he felt himself constrained to move.



"I'll talk with the sentry," he thought, crawling out of the file of sleeping men.

But, by the time he had gained his feet, he had already changed his plan. He felt that mere speech would not content him. He knew that he must seek danger if he was to drown the paroxysms of his former soul.

"What am I to do with myself now?" he thought helplessly, crouching in his place and looking about the garden and walls.

The cloak of a sleepless conscience began to fall on his shoulders. An indifferent fantasy told him that, in all probability, the only course was to leap over the garden wall and to go alone into the midst of the Spanish breastworks, into the fortified by-ways of the Calle del Cosso.

Force, might, exertion of strength! Battle with overwhelming numbers! The eyes, seeking where to cross the wall, plunged into the half-gloom of the ivy thickets, into the quiet alleys of pruned boxwood, into corners where groves of tall camellias scattered white and crimson flowers. From the dark depths there suddenly burst over the greyish wall the black, pointed form of a fragrant cypress. Nearer, faintly, palely luminous, breaking the sombre sternness of the gloom, were bushes of white roses. There glowed in the dark hollows of the black night, like sorrowful lights, drooping garlands of wondrous roses of India, of eternally flowering Bengalese blooms, of flowers born of Aphrodite, and of flowers of the Queen of Flanders. They conquered the night with their snowy white and pale-yellow tints, their tints of the colour of a woman's flesh or of the colour of the morning dawn. They stood in a solid hedge over the basin of the old, for ever murmuring cistern. Their fragrance lifted itself from the darkness, rose from the melancholy of the whispering water. Christopher caught it unexpectedly.

He heard the eternal language of the whispering stream. He sighed with happy amazement as he drew the fleeting odours into his nostrils.

At that moment, as though from the shimmering, light-dripping clumps of roses, from the garlands whiter than snow, appeared a pale face, its eyes open wide with pride, with scorn, with frightful exaltation. Lips half open and the hair dishevelled, piled above the white forehead like a spring storm-cloud . . . there it is, framed in the rough marble casement of the window, that head of inexpressible beauty, that divine countenance, that form of the daughter of Zeus, of Pallas Athena. But instantly the darkness yields another form, another expression; deathly pale, a picture of snow, the beauty closes her eyes before the horrid sight. In her lips there is not a drop of blood. Light flees from her eyes. The eyelids fall on the wounded eyes like unhinged doors. . . .

Christopher could no longer recall that face. It became like a phantasm seen in a dream. It became something as vague as the memory of an old man and of as doubtful existence as the visionary picture of flesh-coloured roses seen in the dark of night. . . .

The soldier rose from his place in silence. He raised his sword and fastened it high. His arms were outstretched to hold the fleeting image. . . . He walked down to the cistern on tiptoe. And now the sleeping bushes of roses were before him. The gentle fragrance sighed to him from the dark. It seemed to him that an invisible head was resting on his breast, that fragrant arms were enfolding his neck. The white, sleepless roses were weeping before him. Of themselves his hands plunged into the wet bush, between the thorny branches, into the hair of their cold leaves. Cutting, tearing, and pricking his fingers, he broke off the flower-laden shoots.

He picked a bouquet so large that he could scarce hold it in his bleeding fist. Slowly, hiding the flowers behind him, he walked up to the fire. The sentry pointed his bayonet at him and, grumbling like a bear, called for the countersign. Christopher threw it at him without looking and went out into the street.

It was alive with watch-fires lit every few steps through the length of Sant' Engracia. The sentries ambled between one fire and the next like swinging pendulums. The soldiers watching the fires were robbing the houses of furniture and throwing it into the fire continually. Balustrades, sides and cornices of carved pieces of mahogany, ebony, and black oak, booty, perhaps, of violence on land or sea, burned with a clear, live flame. Crackling and sparkling with flaming jets, blazed priceless chests, full of papers, mementoes, family relics. Old palimpsests, parchments, and folios from the monastic libraries smouldered malodorously. The entrance doors were torn from their hinges, the black hallways stood open and oozed with the blackness of their depths, like wounds freshly dealt.

Walking from fire to fire, Christopher spoke the watch-word in a single breath and pressed on beyond the walls of the Franciscan convent. He passed the outlet of the small side-street, then two or three doors, and found himself at the entrance to the house where he had fought the preceding day with the group of *voltigeurs*. Here, too, the gate was torn out. It had been consumed long ago in one of the watch-fires. In the hall a foot-soldier was busily chopping cabinets, tables, and chairs. Cedro passed him swiftly and ran to the second floor over the wide, familiar stairs.

He found himself in complete darkness. The strokes of the ax came from below like a dull, insistent pounding on a wall. His outstretched hands groped over walls as slippery as ice,

Here is the door opening on the inner, courtyard balcony of the third story. He found it in the dark. Seeking out the bolt of the ancient lock, he pushed it back with the tip of his scabbard and soon stood on the balcony. Streams of light burst upon him from the windows. Light in those windows! Some people there. . . .

Silently, like a nightmare, he walked round the balcony, trying each board of the floor a hundred times with his foot lest it should creak when he stepped on it.

He walked infinitely long. He thought that he would never drag himself to those lighted windows. But the floor did not creak under his foot, his sword did not rustle. He reached them at length. The first, half-open window was fastened on the second hook. He looked inside through the wide crevice.

He knew this room well. On the rug beside the cabinet lay the slain. Old men . . . there was his priest . . . the grey hair, the bluish chin, a new soutane. The deuce—a new soutane! Not a sign. . . . Next to him, the mangled bodies of the women.

A huge wax-candle in a corner of the room. Two living beings beside the dead. A Franciscan monk, as old as a mushroom, with a bald, yellowed pate as bare as a knee, was kneeling with his back to the window and praying in a mumbling undertone.

Nearer the window, in an old, deep, wide-armed chair, slept the *doncella*. She had, apparently, only just fallen asleep. Her hair had become loose and hung from her weary head like a black wedge, like a cypress with its crest to the ground. Her hands lay in her lap in nerveless impotence. One might have thought that this woman, too, no longer belonged to the world of the living. The soft breathing of the charming breast was the sole sign of life.

Christopher slipped his hand between the halves of the


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sand throats. Cedro felt as though all these shots had passed through him. The girl lifted her head, and her eyes opened wide.

She passed them over the dead.

For a few moments she listened to the cannonade, pale and terror-stricken, her head drawn into her shoulders. Her hand touched the wet and thorny flowers. Boundless amazement opened her lips for a cry.

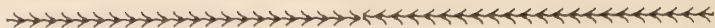
She lowered her head with a violent movement and bent over the flowers. She plunged her eyes into them and sat motionless, as though the cannonade had at that moment killed her soul as it had killed his. The frail windows shook with another volley. The walls trembled dully; the rooms and hallways, the staircases and corridors gave a hollow groan.

The arms of the maid wavered.

With a timorous, impassioned movement the lily-white hands gathered, embraced, caught the roses and pressed them all to her sobbing breast. The maiden rose from her place as if with the intention of going somewhere. But she did not make one step. She grew rigid and motionless.

Her eyes closed, her lips full of sorrowing words, she pressed the flowers to her heart closer and closer. She tore her white fingers on the sharp thorns, she gashed her soft hands. . . .

Christopher ran on tiptoe to the other side of the balcony to return to his post among the fighting men.



### 39. The Encounter

IN the night between the 14th and the 15th of August General Verdier abandoned the siege of Saragossa. It was impossible to take it with preliminary battle.

Christopher Cedro was already in Monte Torrero. He went there on the sixth. A fragment of a grenade struck him on the fifth in the Cosso, wounding him on the hip and making it impossible for him to take part in the army's further activities. He lay in the hospital barracks until the French army began its march up the Ebro, in the direction of Tudela. Toward the end of his week of rest he began to help with some of the lighter tasks in the laying of mines.

The third squadron of Polish lancers, with the improvised artillery of Hupet, was the last to leave Monte Torrero. Stopping at some distance from the river Xalon, the French army waited for the explosion of the mines. Cedro was still exhausted from his illness. He underwent a peculiar change at this time: he grew calm and strong of spirit. He became as if mature, stable, inexorable and unbending in his indifference. Unconsciously he found in this disposition of soul a way out of the labyrinth of his moral tremors and anxieties.

They proceeded on their way over the old route through Alagón and Mallen amid ceaseless attacks by peasants organized into insurgent bands of so-called guerrillas. The regular forces of Don José Palafox y Melcy proceeded in their tracks. The regiment of lancers finally encamped in wooden, hastily constructed sheds, at the very edge of the Ebro. The enemy's lines were not far and it did not have a moment's rest. The horses stood in mud and miry clay and as a result suffered with founder and grapes. Water-rats did not let the

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soldiers sleep at night. And the nights were bitterly cold. The autumn rains had begun to pour. Expeditions, therefore, were almost a delight to the soldier. Christopher obtained his release from the artillery and returned to his squadron and his lance. He was now an old and splendid adept at all the *manie-ments*, volts, and pirouettes of which that arm was capable. In encounters he exhibited a perfect dexterity. He had learned, in the mountains surrounding Saragossa, how to pierce untutored peasants in fiery assault; now he trained himself in the art of battling with regular cavalry. He was now invincible in the ordinary, unsaddling "Arms-point!" in the charge "*en-avant-pointez!*" in parrying left or right, in fierce, treacherous, resistless blows before and behind. He was still learning one thing from the excellent teacher Master Gaykos: the very difficult attack *par le moulinet*, dealt from on high, from over the head, where the lance is held lightly between the fingers and all the force of the body and the entire strength of the blow rest in the index finger. These were rocket-swift yet light blows in the face, between the eyes, in the throat of the enemy, or, rather, enemies. Gaykos now had daily opportunity to show his pupil how to deal out these "fillips." And so they threw themselves, for precept, training, and example, into the thick of Spanish cavalry, *guerrilleros*, or regular infantry, alone, or with a third, a moment after the salvo of shots, before the others had time to load their arms. In a leaping gallop, as fast as horse would go, they burst into the hostile throng. They were inaccessible to either bayonet or sword. The secret of their ability to hold their own against an enemy a hundred times more numerous depended on the fact that the point of the lance broke the resistance of the enemy at a distance of twelve feet from the breast of the uhlan. The Spanish soldier, if he wished to deal a blow, had to come within two or three steps of his adversary.



dottieri, the harsh and blind soldiers-for-pay, he now found himself in the company of men who were refined, younger, more human. He felt that he himself surpassed his new associates in that cold sobriety with which he had become imbued in the company of the old campaigners. Valour in the group of which he was now part was not yet the stonelike ferocity of the others, glory was in the sheen of the sword-blades, honour was a lever, and love of the distant homeland was a religion of the soul. Not of all, to be sure. . . . Cedro became an out-and-out officer, he accepted all the virtues and all the vices of that condition in the gross, humbly and without reservations, as a newly-converted proselyte accepts not only the ritual, but the entire *modus vivendi* which it involves. After the lapse of a few days in this new state of dignity he already noticed that he excelled many of his new companions in military knowledge and experience. Very few of the younger had served as common soldiers as long as he. Very few had fought as he had fought at Saragossa and Tudela. . . .

From Tudela, pursuing Peña, the commander of the Spanish who had taken the place of Castaños, and who was now retreating in panic, Marshal Ney moved toward Tarazona and thence, through the mountains, over a highway running parallel to the valley of the Ebro, to Plasencia. From Plasencia he proceeded southward along the river Xalon, through Muela, El Almunia, Morata—over the ancient military road of the Romans, the age-old highway from Casaraugusta to Mantua Carpetanorum, otherwise Madrid, the highway leading through Bilibis. . . .

The army knew already that Napoleon was in Spain and that he was making for Madrid by way of Burgos, by a route parallel to theirs. General Lefebvre-Desnouettes was in command of the cavalry of the sixth corps which marched in the

as transparent as a limpid sea, sank in the mists, the steaming fogs, the driving storms. The horses, walking slowly, smoked and sweated under the housings and the cloaks which the riders flung behind them. Suddenly, like a pistol-shot, would come the word of command: "To arms!"

The right halves of the open cloaks would swing with one accord. In the mist would appear something like a thick, black, ground-trailing cloud.

"Arms—attack!"

Christopher drew his sword. He took his horse under control with his knees, his left hand, the tips of his spurs. The whirling pennons gave a prolonged whirr, like the piercing cry of a hawk. . . .

"Flankers forward!"

"Squadron to attack!"

"Platoons—march!"

"March!"

Slowly at first, in a measured trot, the squadron moved over the plain until the hostile cavalry was in plain view. Then excitedly, with all the others, Cedro cried out: "Reins short!"

Reining its chargers, the flanker platoon of grenadiers set off at a gallop. The Spanish horsemen were approaching at an even pace. Allowing the onrushing host to come within shooting-range, they released a volley of carbine-fire. An instant after the shot, falling apart in two wings, they darted off to right and left.

The horses of the Poles were proceeding nimbly. Seeing the host in front of him making off to the right, Cedro commanded: "Full gallop—on!"

In the same instant the riders saw a vivid flash as of lightning flying over the ground. It was the fire of a line of infantry concealed in a row of ditches behind the cavalry. Now

is afire, it is stony, riddled with horses' hoofs, torn and trampled. . . . Clods of sod are in his lips, his mouth is full of blood. The ground is slipping away. . . .

His head strikes against stones and wet lumps of clay. Thorny cactuses and stunted sloes slip through the clenched hand. . . . Until, lo, a sudden, frightful thought: "My foot stayed in the stirrup. The racing horse is dragging my corpse. . . ."

Then suddenly quietude, peace, untold bliss. Wet ground all about him. Thick darkness. Horses racing past him. Where do they come from? They whinny and squeal. Their bellies are covered with patches of foam. A clatter of hoofs! A thundering clatter rumbling over the ground. . . . "What horses are these? The stud in Stoklosy—yes, without doubt. Who frightened my horses?"

"Your Worship!" Gaykos is howling. He is sobbing. His thick hands carefully lift the unconscious head from the ground. He is carrying him, carrying him on his sobbing breast, on his frenzied heart.

"They've killed him!" he howls to all the squadron. "They've killed our gentleman! Here's your damned victory for you! Here's victory for you! Hell blast it all. . . ."

The nerveless lips repeat a faint whisper: "My sword, my golden sword. . . ."



40. Phantoms

THE night was cold.

A penetrating breeze blew over the plains from the direction of the sheer cliffs of Guadarrama and Romosierra, which still showed on the northern horizon like a dark, sullen girdle. Guns, caissons, and supply wagons thudded and rumbled as they rolled on over the highway. Christopher lay on his back, his eyes fixed upon the cloudy sky. He heard the constant cracking of the whip, the outlandish calls and whistles of the muleteer, the monotonous clangour of the bells, the jangle of the iron harness of the wagons, the measured clatter of the wheels. The mattress, suspended from iron hooks, swayed in a scraping yet melodious measure, for all the world like a certain shutter at a corner of the house in Stoklosy. Concerning this shutter a popular legend circled far and near over the country-side. It was said that it foretold inclement weather. Whenever in the loveliest June droughts, in the calmest July weather, it began only to scrape, to cough now and then, to complain of ague in its hinges, and to croak over the cracking in its bolts, men would begin to heap the drying hay at break-neck speed, to rake the scattered clover, to sheave the grain, and to stack it with feverish haste. Oftentimes it happened that an overseer or a keeper would come from a distant village to listen of an early evening, to hear if the shutter did not hold some evil tidings.

Christopher now heard the scraping of the hooks, but he had no very clear notion of where he was. A hostile darkness, disastrous, injurious darkness, lay upon him. An icy pale surrounded him, a sombre area pitted with grey holes from which issued endless caravans of forms. Contours which the mind and the eye seek to capture emerge from the greyness, not



like pictures painted on canvas, not like figures carved in marble, but like grotesque, artificially animated manikins. Some are of shaggy felt, a felt rough with tiny fibrils which glisten under the drowsy, acrid, melancholy light. . . . Their eyelashes are of woollen yarn, of heavy fringe, their eyebrows stand out fully two fingers, their hair is of wire. Their moveless eyes deal the thrust of their clothly look straight at the flaming brain and vanish in void, mysterious realms, in regions of sorrow and tears. . . . Scarcely has one disappeared when another comes to the surface and watches over the weary brain. Not one will be driven off by acts of will. . . . The head is like an empty, boundless sky over which travel multiform clouds driven by unseen winds. . . .

The brain burns with a vivid blaze. Tongues of thought are flaming in it. The charred lips whisper: "Trepka . . . Stephen . . . give me something to drink, something to drink. . . . We shan't come out of this frightful forest tonight. . . . The holy stag with the cross between his antlers met us in the forest . . . Raphael shot at him. . . . Stephen, give me something to drink, something to drink . . ."

Slowly, trenchantly, like the point of a lance, rises the hostile question: "How in heaven's name is Trepka to be here? Where?"

Calm and sober thoughts return, a surge of clear consciousness flows back: "I must have dreamed of Trepka. . . ."

And once more, like enormous clouds, crowd thoughts of another order, come, from elsewhere, impassioned syllogisms, importunate questions, dextrous, witty answers, long series of brilliant visions, of true discoveries, of vast inventions in the province of human thought. Kindly laughter surrounds them like a mist. . . .

"You are not so foolish, after all, as I thought, my dear

Stephen. . . . No, not at all! There is a sense, a substance in your pratings. A new ditch cut in the ancient bogs on the Visloka means more than a victorious skirmish. . . . Is it so? More than a skirmish at Burviedro, at Calatayud? One shelter house, one hospital, you say, in your district means more than a captured standard. . . . Is it so? But they are wholly different things, my dear. . . . Surely that's obvious. . . .

"You are amusing, old man, you are amusing with your homely, bread-eating philosophy. Your deep, thought-out fatuity is goodness itself, it brings bitter tears to my eyes. You have forsworn heroism, not only for yourself, but for your sons and grandsons; you pluck the plumes from your helmet for ever and ever and throw away your knightly sword. You have wedded lowly toil in order to redeem your grandsires and your grandsons. . . . You're droll, old thing, you're droll. . . ."

"And you think that that is so?" Trepka, or a devil from one of the pictures in a side nave of St. Jacob's Church in Saragossa, laughs straight into his ear. . . .

An icy terror sweeps through the breast. Its legs are like icicles and as light as a cold breath. A frightful shudder runs through the body at every step it makes. It leans over it and whispers: "You would jump into the sleigh in the morning, the small, one-horse sleigh. A smooth, fresh road. The first snow. You'd make off at a gallop to see what was happening in Olshyna. If they're well, if father . . . if Mary . . ."

Suddenly an insistent voice moves the half-dead body. "Master Cedro, Master Cedro!"

"Who is there?" he answers with difficulty.

"It's I—"

"Who's that?"



"I—subaltern adjutant Pruski."

"I don't know."

"Don't you recognize me?"

"I don't know anything."

"But you're looking at me."

"Yes."

"We were wounded together at Burviedro. My hand was ripped off and you were shot through. They're carrying us together. You remember Gaykos?"

"Certainly, certainly."

"I swore to him that I would nurse you through this. Do you understand me now?"

"What place is this?"

"Drink some of this *bouillon*, drink it down fast. . . . Drink it heartily; it's good!"

"Where are we now?"

"We've passed the city."

"What was the name of it?"

"Alcalá de Henares. The road turned there to the west. The wind has stopped. They say that the great capital, Madrid, will come into view directly, as soon as day breaks. We're scarcely three leagues away. They'll put us in the hospital there, when the Emperor takes the capital. Frightful cold we've got. A sleety hail was coming down, but it's quieted now."

"And where are we coming from?"

"Good heavens, man! From Burviedro, of course. We left it a week ago!"

"A week . . ."

"You don't remember anything?"

"Maybe I do, but tell me anyhow . . ."

"In Calatayud they put us on this wagon, on mattresses. Do you remember? You were talking with me yet when we


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Suddenly, a mighty shout, a single cry from manly, healthy, soldiers' breasts booms like the tuneful volley of a hundred cannon: "*Vive l'Empereur!*"

A moment later a second cry: "Long live the Emperor!"

A moment of silence. . . . Then once more bursts that mad storm of joy, that enraptured hymn, that ocean locked within the compass of a word: "Long live the Emperor!"

A different shiver ran through the body. It vanished and with it the thought of the meaning of that all-powerful out-cry.

Silence ensued.

In the aisle between the two rows of invalids appeared an officer of giant stature and read the Emperor's message in a clear, stentorian, powerful voice. The manifesto proclaimed to all present—the well and the dying, the hard-labouring populace and the rich, priests and laymen, Frenchmen and Spaniards—to each and all, in short, who breathed on the Iberian peninsula—that by those presents the Emperor of the French abolished and for ever annulled the Holy Inquisition, released its prisoners, and quashed its prosecutions, that he reduced the number of monasteries and convents by two-thirds, that he overthrew and for ever cancelled the ancient rights of feudal lords, that he abrogated and destroyed all privileges. . . .

Christopher heard distinctly and understood all.

"Now, Stephen dear," he muttered, laughing to himself and yawning, "now you know why we stormed old Saragossa, Aljafería with its prisoners, why we drowned our lances in the blood of the dark masses at Tudela. Your bill of rights is written in our blood, O Spanish prisoner!"

He turned his head to one side and looked into the sunlit plain. He gazed at the stony ground about his bed, at the clay sodden in the night and only just beginning to dry and



“Your name?”

“I left my father’s house—I believed that it was for my country—and now—on foreign soil— Say that it was not in vain, that it was for my land—Emperor, Emperor!”

The mute and deaf eyes plunged into the delirious eyes of the invalid, eyes mad with deathless love. Moveless and thoughtful stood Napoleon. Who knows? Perhaps in those inspired eyes he saw his own young soul. Perhaps the rosy snows of the crags of Monte Oro, perhaps the piñons on the crests of Monte Rotondo, perhaps the stony shores of the island lashed by the foams of the raging sea. Perhaps he weighed, for a moment, his Corsican love of liberty with the crown of ruler over peoples strange to him and the sceptre of Charlemagne. Perhaps he sighed in sorrow over that which had already dried in his soul, crumbled, and been scattered by the winds like the stalk of a dead flower, over the engrossment of a young, just, and proud soul in the misfortunes of its country.

“*Vive la Pologne!*” Cedro sought to cry out, as, strengthless, he fell back upon his mattress. He did not cry, however, for the words were drowned in a stream of blood which suddenly gushed from his mouth.

The Emperor stood over him for a long moment. He looked into his face with stony eyes. Finally he raised his hand to his hat and said: “*Soit.*”

He walked away in a slow, cold, measured step. Behind him a throng of generals. He disappeared between the columns of infantry, between the massed files of horse.



## 41. On the Banks of the Ravka

THE second company of the first squadron of uhlans of Dzievanovski's regiment started out early in the morning on patrol duty. It had rained all night long and stopped only towards day-break. Drooping clouds lifted slowly from the Mazovian plains, unveiling a distant, wooded horizon.

The company had orders to cross the muds of the little river Ravka, to enter the forests at the point where the last vedette was posted, to reconnoitre them in all directions, and to unite with its own sixth regiment and the cavalry brigade of Bieganski. A hundred and seventy horsemen, with a captain, lieutenant, and two second-lieutenants, rode briskly, away from the Warsaw highway. In the beginning they looked for a good place to cross every few hundred steps, but the search proved futile at every point.

After the spring thaw and rains the valley of the Ravka had become a shallow flood-sheet, which spread over the driest fields.

Second-lieutenant Raphael Olbromski was in blithe spirits that early morning. The horse under him was bursting with vigour and carried him lovingly. Every call of the plover brought to mind some pleasant thing and, it seemed, an already forgotten and now wholly unfamiliar joy.

Nearing the village of Reguly, the soldiers came upon peasants ploughing their holdings. The wet clods, freshly turned, shone like polished iron. At times a whiff of wind would bring the odour of manure, an odour which hit one like a smart blow and vanished instantly in the cleanly air.

The company emerged upon harder ground and bounded on over the sterile fallows. The horses' hoofs still sank in the clay and, torn from the stiffening ground, groaned in a



measured tempo. Just below the village of Prushkov they forded the Utrata and started southward over the sands into the woods. As soon as they had crossed the little river, Captain Katerla halted his division and aligned it for patrol work. Twenty-five horse, with a lieutenant at their head, were formed into an advance guard. Ten of these were to patrol, fifteen were to proceed in a body two thousand paces in front of the main division. Twenty horsemen under a second-lieutenant were put in the rear guard two thousand paces behind the main division. In such order they entered the woods.

The dry, denuded forests were voiceless and still.

The underbrush—oak, hornbeam saplings, hazel shrubs—had but barely begun to give sign of life. The dry, crumbling leaves rustled under the horses' hoofs.

The sun had risen by this time and the naked forest seemed to be stretching and lifting itself from sleep. Here and there opened a field, like a bay cutting into the woods, and the eye travelled over miles of empty Mazovian plains. In the midst of one of these harbours lay a solitary village—some odd dozen whitewashed huts roofed with thatch. The dwellings stood on both sides of a sandy roadway. Over the roofs towered naked lindens and forked willows. Still, silent solitude. . . . A stork clattered in the crown of the tallest tree. They took the first peasant they encountered, as he was, from the field, and had him guide them to Nadarzyn. A covey of children in miserable little shirts ran out to look on the gleaming army and followed it for a long, long while with dazzled, staring eyes. Dogs barked without end, even when the division had long been sunk in the forest.

Raphael took his horse from the rutty path and rode him through the forest outside the file of soldiers. He listened delightedly to the swish of the horse's hoofs through the brown, sere remains of last year's beech-leaves and the layers of

cracking stems. His thoughts sped on, like a look seeking to pierce a dense forest.

His father came before him, a figure bearing every semblance of reality. He scarcely ever thought of him, never, certainly, with longing. Why now? An old bent man is trudging on, as if overgrown with yellowish mould, feeling the snow-drifts before him with a feeble stick. An old cap on his head, a loose coat, the same worn shoes. Old skinflint Olbromski of Tarniny. What strange, what odd, what unfathomed sorrow!

Oh, he had always beaten him—this father—from earliest childhood. He used to humiliate him, abuse, torment, maltreat, and betray him. He chased him from home, from beneath his roof, out into the rain and storm. And Peter! He drove him out for all time. For ever and ever. . . . His heart did not quicken, did not tremble, when the other tossed about the world, in marshes, in field-hospitals, in camps. It felt no warning pang when, riddled with bullets, he lay half dead in the field, when he died, unreconciled, unembraced. He is rotting now, far, far away. . . .

Whence this strange, boundless regret?

It seems to him that he is not thinking of his father, but that he himself is the withered old man of Tarniny, that all the thoughts of the other, the deepest roots of his thoughts, the finest threads of his cognition, of his sensations, are his own thoughts, his own feelings. He can feel them tremble, swarm, suffer. It isn't he who feels this regret, oh no! It is the old man who is oppressed by this dark, irreparable, unfathomed impulse of feeling.

A new spring has come, a fresh whiff of vital air has touched and wakened every clod of earth, a warm, soft breeze blows from across the Vistula upon the low, Sandomierian

plain. Everywhere, as far as the eyes can reach, new life is being born. Year in and year out, for an untold length of years, this same life is born anew. But Peter will not come back.

He is gone. He has become a lump of clay, a gob of manure, a pinch of ash. Probably not more than one whole bone is left. If one could see at least how much dust is left of him! If one could feel it with one's hand! If he lay in the cemetery which stands there in the field, he would go to him now, when no one would be looking, and speak his fatherly will and command into his grave. But, as it is— What a frightful thing it is to outlive one's child! The heart of the old man shrinks, draws and coils into itself, but it cannot shed another tear.

His eyes pass over the fields. In all directions . . . He stops. He looks into space. The other, too, is gone. Who knows whether this one will return? When will he return? Hard and cold thoughts push these fears away. The spring wind dries the solitary teardrop on the drooping lower lid. Hard will curbs the soft emotion. Swiftly the old man walks on, swiftly leans on his stick. His mind once more begins to weigh ordinary, everyday, husbandman's thoughts. What will he sow on this soil, what on that? Is he to harrow this piece of ground or plough that?

And, lo, the old self-will, implacably dogged and as all-sundering as keen Damascus steel, creeps out anew from some imperceptible crevice. No, he will not forgive, he will never pardon him! Let him perish, let him die! Even if he should come back, like a chased hound, and lick the uppers of his boots, he will not stroke him with his hand. Draw his sword against his father? Let him perish for all time, if that's the case!

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The clods of earth rise bold and sharp before the red, flaming eyes. . . . Guess which of these he has become. . . . Guess, guesser, guess. . . .

Something is tearing the ligaments of Raphael's soul, and a bottomless pain, a hell-possessed pain lying between father and son, a torture unequalled on earth, contorts his face. He pities the old man, he suffers for him and in him, and that pity racks the heart amidst feelings of injury, of insult, amidst revulsion and anger.

He looked about him in surprise.

The sun was shining brilliantly. Golden-white gleams wandered aimlessly over the forest. They rested on the naked birch-trees, naked and piteously charming, like lovely women violated and stripped of their garments by brutal strength. They rested, darkened, slipped away. They entered the green groves of pine and there, beneath the dry needles, industriously sought the straining and panting sprouts of vernal herbs.

Suddenly a radiant reach of blue opened before his veiled, dreaming eyes. A wide field came into view, stretching for miles to the south. Far in this sandy plain lay Nadarzyn, a grey blur of barns relieved by the gleam of the wide copper roof of the church and its little spire.

Raphael was gazing indifferently upon the sandy fallows, tracing the barely visible ruts in the already dry road, when suddenly he heard the hoarse, muffled voice of the captain: "Stop!"

At the sound of this voice the horses stopped as if rooted to the spot, before the hand of the rider could pull in the reins. The golden sheen of the bays had turned a dark brown. All were steaming profusely. Some were already coated with a thin film of foam.

"Attention—ready to dismount!"

With a feeling of bodily satisfaction Olbromski threw the reins to the right side, wound the mane about the fingers of his left hand, and lightly removed his right foot from the stirrup.

"Dismount!" shouted the captain.

Smoothly, perfectly, like an incomparable model, he swung his right leg, toes downward, spurs up, over his splendid gelding.

As one man the company stood in position until the command: "In place—rest!"

Raphael left his trained Bratek to himself, with the reins thrown over the saddle, and stepped out of the ranks to stretch his legs. But the captain had not stopped for rest alone. He passed in front of the vanguard, muttering phrases which would be most unbeseeming in polite circles, chose one of the soldiers, a handsome, strapping Mazur, and beckoned to him to step out. He picked out another and beckoned to him. He told them to unfasten their swords, lay their lances on the ground, take off their caps, and carefully climb the two tallest pines standing at the edge of the forest.

The two men leaped up to the trees and, climbing like squirrels, scrambled from knot to knot, up the northward side of the trees, as they had been ordered, until they reached the top.

"What do you see?" the captain asked in a muffled voice.

The men were silent.

"Look, both of you! Do you see the highway leading from the woods to Nadarzyn?"

"Yes, captain."

"Beyond Nadarzyn can you still see the highway or not?"

"You can."

"Look at the fields, all around. Are you looking?"

"Yes, captain."

"Are they clear?"

“Cl—”

Suddenly, with one accord, the two soldiers began to slip down the trees, clicking their spurs and hurriedly loosening their epaulets from the catching knurls of the bark.

"What is it?" the captain growled at them.

The men jumped to the ground. They ran to their horses, picked up their caps and lances, and whispered: "Cavalry, cavalry!"

The captain turned sharply in the direction in which they pointed. He saw nothing at first. The fields were cut by clumps of birch and pine. From the direction of the great forest, over the fields, came a measured, rustling, bell-like sound. Raphael's heart gave a violent beat, then slowly calmed down.

"Hoof-hoof, hoof-hoof . . ."

Scattered thoughts began to stream through his head: "Can it be? The deer coming down from Bald Mountain . . ."

"Attention—ready to mount!" the captain commanded, quietly, secretly.

"To horse!"

Unconsciously, his eyes fixed on the distant scene, Raphael swung his leg over the horse's back, pushed his foot into the stirrup, and threw the ends of the reins over the left side. He adjusted himself in the saddle, pulled himself together, grew to his horse, and stood motionless.

Bratek snorted softly and flicked his ears.

The distant drum of the horses' hoofs on the wet, soft ground floated dully over the fields. The eyes of officers, sergeants, corporals, trumpeters, privates, strained like bow-strings drawn to the utmost pitch in the direction of the far-off rhythm. And suddenly, from behind a little wood, a verst away, came a squadron of imperial hussars. It moved slowly, fluidly, with a charming play of bright colours. The captain

stood as if wholly petrified. His face was like a face of marble. He was all eyes.

The Austrian patrol proceeded in the direction of the Nadarzyn highway. It was returning, apparently, from a reconnaissance. It was cutting the field obliquely in front of the Polish detachment. When the entire Austrian force was in the field and its number apparent—it was much greater than that of the Poles—the captain suddenly threw the command: “Lances to attack!”

Swifter than the word was said, the men slipped their right hands down the shaft of the pike as far as they could reach without bending their trunks. There they seized the lance with their knobbed Mazovian fists. They lifted it from the leather boot at the stirrup. The first file levelled its spearheads at the chests of the enemy, took the shafts under its arms, pressed them to its ribs. The second file kept hold of the shafts—and waited.

The captain seated himself firmly and put his hand on the hilt of his sword. Likewise the rest of the officers. A long breath. . . .

With a flash the officers’ sabres, drawn from their scabbards, whizzed through the air like a single sword.

“Shorten reins!”

He passed a steely glance over the men.

“Forward!”

“March, march!”

The spurs dug into the flanks of the horses. The line gave a quiver and rushed out of the woods. At first it moved in uneven leaps, as though it were seeking a tempo in which the entire force could unite. It caught it instantly. And then the men and horses came to be like a solid mass, like a huge conglomerate, like a rock which had broken from the topmost crest of a mountain chain and was sweeping down into abys-

mal depths. The pace grew swifter and swifter, and as it increased, the soldiers bent lower and lower over their horses' necks. Clods of soft turf, hurled by the horses' hoofs, swirled through the air.

"At them!"

For Raphael this flying dash was a mad delight. His puckered eyes held a gleaming azure streak. Hearing the captain's cry, he opened his eyes. He was some eighty paces from the enemy's line.

The half-squadron of imperial hussars, one of six marching in the advance guard of the field-marshal, General von Schauroth, had long seen the Polish division. The patrol had been drawn up and was racing to meet it as fast as horse would go. The officers rushed on at the sides, shouting and directing the onslaught with their outstretched swords. When the first two Polish files were so pressed by those behind them that the horses' heads wedged into the row of riders, and the breasts of the chargers fell against the haunches of the horses in front of them and pushed into their file, the formation of hussars, racing forward at an angle, closed with the Poles. The uhlans fell into the half-squadron like a missile. The first serried ranks scattered in all directions. Some odd score men, unsaddled with the lance, howled under the horses' hoofs.

But the second and third rows came full tilt with iron strength and fought with their sabres, from the saddle. Second-lieutenant Olbromski pushed into this dense mass of soldiery. He had his sabre, and, while the sabres of the others whirled and flashed, he began to slash at them with fury and delight. All about him eyes were narrowed, brows were drawn and nostrils panting. White teeth flashed. Blades whizzed and rang. Shots banged and wild uproar reigned on all sides.

Having overcome the first onslaught, the attack with lances,

the body of hussars now charged full force, with swords. Raphael realized perfectly how the Austrian wings, scattered a moment ago, came together at once and united again, how the old trained and expert Palatine soldier reached the newly-drafted soldier with his stone-whetted broadsword and felled him with venom and address; so that, seeing before him a vacant spot and an old swordsman engaged in battle, he fell upon him like a shot. Standing in his stirrups, he swung at him once, then again, with lightning speed. The soldier parried the blows and, it seemed, made off. Another rushed into his place, a very image of the first. Their horses locked breast to breast, their swords clashed and gave a grating, scraping clang. Raphael seized an opportunity, pressed his feet into his stirrups, stood poised for an instant, and then came down with all his might. But suddenly the first, who seemingly had fled, biting his horse so violently that the animal reared with open jaws and threw itself forward, lunged at the rider.

"Hit him! Hit that son of a dog!" holloed the sergeant from somewhere in the wing.

Raphael felt sure of his mettle and warded off all blows with confidence and strength. His sword whirled like a streak of lightning, it shot and struck fire in all directions. Presently the warrior lurched sideward under a frightful weight.

"He has broken my arm—" this much had time to pass through his mind.

The sword was falling out of his hand, from between frozen fingers. . . . He grasped it once more with all his might, with all his strength, all his heart, and raised the numb and heavy arm, but he could no longer deal the blow. A heavy feeling of creeping things, creeping ants in his hand, in his elbow, in his arm. . . .

The hussar then leaned back in his saddle and ran his sword into the breast of the uhlan. The blade scraped over the bone

and bit into the side in a tongue of flame. The Austrian rider drew back violently and fell sideward from his saddle, smitten by the trusty sword of the sergeant in the wing. A moment later he was crouching on the ground, clasping his shattered jaw with both his hands. His grey, dreadful eyes looked into space; from his throat came an animal roar. With a furtive movement Olbromski pulled his pistol from its holster and shot at the man's head, from above, straight into those frenzied eyes. Having done this, he cast a glance at his trousers and saw with amazement and anger that his left thigh, knee, and boot were drenched with blood.

"Who the devil has smeared me in this fashion?" he thought as in a dream.

It seemed to him that the whole field was turning yellow and that rows of greenish flames were spurting from it. He dropped the reins and began to rub his eyes with his left hand.

Playing their lances with outcries and tumult, shooting, and swinging their sabres, a disordered throng of uhlans surrounded and gathered him into its midst. He heard the incessant cry of the captain, of the lieutenant, and of his fellow second-lieutenant: "Stop! Fall in there!" Like one possessed, the senior sergeant was bellowing the same command. They were retreating toward the forest, but continued to fend off the Austrian onslaught with all their strength. Here and there single riders were still chasing each other over the field. The patrol, which finally began to rally at the edge of the forest, had taken some fifteen or sixteen prisoners.

Raphael's understanding of what was happening about him was now becoming very clouded. He felt uncomfortable, nauseated, foolish. He had allowed himself to be hacked, like a coward. . . . The uproar of battle, the clang of swords and wild outcries, had now subsided somewhat, and scattered uhlans began to return to their group. They were panting;

their horses were mad and covered with foam. An occasional one led a Hungarian mount, another dragged a wounded or battered hussar. Someone noticed finally that second-lieutenant Olbromski was rather more than normally gory.

He resisted and put up a brave front. When, at the command of the captain, the senior sergeant opened his slashed coat, a lush stream of blood began to squirt from his breast. His underclothes were all in blood, his coat was steeped in it to the last stitch. They laid the warrior on the ground, stripped off his clothing, and hurriedly examined the wound. It was in the breast and side. It went up, toward the arm-pit. The captain himself began to feel it with his coarse fingers, looking for the bullet. When the wounded man assured him that the wound was not from a shot, he had the gash washed with whisky and tied with rags. Bandaged and bound as though with a corset and lifted to his horse, he seated himself in the saddle as in a chair. The company, with its wounded and prisoners in the centre, proceeded slowly along the edge of the woods in the direction of the highway.

They moved swiftly, studying their prisoners with curiosity, friendliness, and a certain air of respect. Raphael did not feel well. He still had the same feeling of nausea and dull depression. An unpleasant drowsiness was coming over him, as after a drunken debauch. His head was heavy, his arms and legs full of fire.

It was a little past noon when they came out of the forest. They rode straight into a vortex of troops. . . .

A surgeon turned up finally and took Raphael in hand. As the first officer wounded on that occasion, he was given very special attention. The surgeon took him in the direction of Warsaw, to the village of Opacha. . . .

Olbromski was tired and weak from loss of blood. He looked indifferently at the manor-house in Opacha which the

surgeon was pointing out to him and indifferently listened to his assurances that he would be a hundred times more comfortable there than in the ambulatory hospital set up in the Rashyn tavern. The Opacha manor stood in a small, empty park. A fence separated it from the Warsaw highway and the field. Raphael took particular notice of this dilapidated fence, lying, in places, in utter ruin and decay. He felt better and more cheerful at the sight of the white mansion. Something like his native homestead came before his eyes. Muslin curtains hung in the windows "on the other side," where, no doubt, was the seldom opened drawing-room. The corner of a pigeon-house peeped from the yard. Farther back was the stockyard, shabby outhouses, and piles of manure, freshly heaped and smoking like a juniper bonfire. The entrance to the house was locked. . . .

The key finally scraped in the lock, and Raphael was led into the hall. The surgeon was clamorously rating a puny little man, a steward or assistant care-taker, who squinted at Raphael with hostile aversion and smacked his lips the while in peculiar fashion. Told to open the door of the best room "on the other side," he hung back until the surgeon took him by the collar.

The little salon was strangely empty, as though it had just been stripped of its furniture. The air in it was stagnant and dank. Adjoining the first room was a smaller, but more comfortably fitted chamber. It held a bed spread with perfectly fresh linen, a satin quilt, soft covers, and a pile of embroidered pillows.

"Oh, that's the thing! This is just what we need!" the doctor exclaimed. "Here our young officer will feel better."

"I won't let anyone in here!" the surly burgrave rasped out.

"You won't?"

"I won't. This bed belongs to the mistress of this house

herself. I have orders *strictissime* to send this bed away at once."

"Then I *strictissime* cancel that order."

"Phee—"

"Dash away after some hot water in a large, clean bowl. See to it that it's on this spot inside of two aves!" Raphael's benefactor thundered out, seizing hold of the man a second time and pushing him through the door.

From the hall came a voice by no means docile or subdued: "I'm going, but you whipper-snappers will remember this!"

"Untie the horse from the fence! Take him into the stables! Give him a full manger of oats! Do you hear?"

"I hear you well enough," the other grumbled from a corner of the hall.

The surgeon soon dressed Raphael's wounds. He suffered not a little when the gash was being probed and washed, but was somewhat relieved, too, when the doctor assured him that the hussar's sword had cut very few ligaments. It seemed as though it had slipped over the bones and only ripped a good bit of flesh on the side and under the arm-pit. Bandaged and serene, the uhlan sank into the downy pillows. The surgeon enjoined quiet and at parting promised a visit on the following morning.

The day faded slowly and sank into the night. No one came to light the candles. Raphael did not take umbrage at this—he was enjoying utter and complete repose.

He had a sensation of indescribable well-being. Pleasant and happy thoughts came to him and hovered at his head-rest like longed-for friends, like pleasing and beloved forms, like the fragrance of familiar flowers remembered from childhood days, from native parts. For the first time in so many years he asked to review the hardest hours, the most difficult


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trials of his life, and summoned them to him. He saw them all in the radiant beams of a joyous peace of spirit. . . .

He was wakened from his reverie by an extraordinary commotion.

Some one was walking in the hall with a light, swearing loudly and talking. At length he entered the front room connecting with Raphael's. He examined its meagre furniture and pushed and flung it about with loud and disgruntled scolding. Soon he came up to the bed. Raphael glared furiously at the intruder and was just about to order him out when he suddenly noticed his uniform and grew mute. The officer was dressed in the short, dark-blue coat of an uhlan, with a general's lace and insignia, and long, amaranth trousers. He had taken off his four-cornered cap, sumptuously gallooned and topped with a tall, black plume, and held it in his hand. Raising the tallow candle in its pewter holder and wheezing loudly, he bent over the piled cushions.

"The devil brought you here," he muttered through his teeth.

His face was long, smooth shaven, of the colour of rusty sandstone. Ice-cold, bulging eyes, with baggy lids, looked with wisdom and disdain. Tight-shut lips, narrow and stern, seemed to restrain insulting words, to keep them by force behind the teeth. The wounded soldier had already seen that head many times, with its thick, long nose and the deep folds running down the sides of the face, but he looked at it now with doubled curiosity. The general stood over him with the candle for some time and searched him with a piercing look. After that he suddenly turned about and went into the first room. There, shuffling the table and chairs, he finally seated himself. He spread a large map on the one little table and, leaning his head on his fists, plunged into a study of the map or into mathematical calculations. At times he muttered something



to himself, then again made notations in his pocket note-book.

Raphael could no longer think of sleep. He had before him a squirming round of light, the black, dishevelled, curly shag of the general and the huge shadow of his head on the opposite wall. He was sure that they would throw him out of his feathery bed at any moment. However, this certainly did not worry him in the least, for he was sufficiently rested and in good spirits. His wound caused him no great discomfort, while his feeling of general flaccidity had passed completely.

The general studied his map for more than an hour. Having finished, it would appear, some calculations, he folded the map, closed his note-book, spread his elbows on the table, laid his head on his arms. . . . He dozed in this manner for some time, but when sleep began to assail him in earnest, he rose and, lumbering about the room, began to look for a place where he might lie down.

There was no place, unless the floor. He pushed together the two crooked chairs, but they were not long enough. Suddenly he turned his head and looked into Raphael's dark little room. After a moment he went in. He found the sick man in the dark, pushed him over to the wall, and lay down on the cleared half of the bed.

Raphael moved respectfully to the very edge of the bed and ceded the covers.

"You needn't!" General Sokolnicki grumbled out. "Lie quietly if you are well off. The surgeon told me that you've been wounded. Where was it?"

"I have a wound in the side."

"I ask, in what encounter? Let the surgeon coddle your wound, not me!"

"Near the woods, general."

"What is your name?" he muttered, already almost asleep.

Raphael gave his name.





"In the capacity—in the capacity—"

"Quick, quick!"

"In the capacity—simply of second lieutenant *à la suite*."

"I have no right to do that and I know no such rank. I am only a brigadier-general and you a wounded little officer. When I become commander-in-chief *in partibus infidelium*, I shall not forget that we once slept under one quilt."

"I am well already and I do not know where my squadron is. They say that it's beyond the Ravka. Let me stay beside you in this battle without any rank until I find my command."

"Very well. Wake me at dawn and now be good enough to keep still and—the devil take you!"

A moment later he was snoring.

As soon as the rising day outlined the panes of the window in the large room, Raphael crawled over the general, who was sleeping like a stone, and put on his uniform as deftly, as quickly, as his wound allowed him. He could not button his coat by any manner of means because of the thick layers of bandages with which his ribs were swathed. He began to tug at the general's arm.

"Who? What?" the sleepy general raged.

"General, it is day!"

"Go away or I'll kill you!"

"General, I will not let you sleep another minute. It is day!"

Realizing that words would not help, Raphael resorted to strength. At length Sokolnicki raised his huge eyelids and began to swear like a trooper. Still not wholly awake, he asked: "Are they attacking?"

"Yes, attacking, attacking!"

He wakened finally and sat up in the bed. A moment later he shook himself and jumped to his feet.

"Well, thank God even for that bit of sleep! The devil!



ginning to kindle. A penetrating cold came from the banks of the river.

Raphael bounded into the yard and after a moment of violent knocking roused the men, who instantly saddled and brought out his Bratek. The general had them harness a nag and a small cart for him. He was soon on his way to Rashyn, driven by a dirty farm-hand. Olbromski rode at his side on horseback.

From afar, on the road and within the entrenchments in front of the Rashyn church, they already saw even lines of troops, standing in formation. The black, cornered caps, the eagles and the pompons, the short coats with white plastrons, the white trousers, the shoes and gaiters, made long lines in the darkness. The train of cannon and wagons formed a dark, rough hill behind the parsonage, above the pond, along its flooded edge. To right and left of the road, between Opacha and Rashyn, gleamed white tents. Here and there streamers of vagrant smoke still rose from dying fires. Beside the road, along the river's bed, stood the mounted uhlan pickets, with flags in their caps, their pistols cocked, motionless, blue in the mist and stillness. Raphael was swept by a long unexperienced fear, an anxious sorrow, as he looked at this dozing army. He waited impatiently for the alarm, for the shot. . . .

But the silence was unbroken. The mists over the pond began to billow and move. Black alders, willows, began to emerge.

The cart moved slowly through the puddles and ruts of the miry Warsaw road. Sokolnicki climbed out before it reached the groundworks. The three battalions, upon seeing him, fell into formation.

The adjutants rushed out of the ranks and, saluting, surrounded the general. The colonels, the commanders of the



growing on both sides of the dam trembled as if thrown into a dark pit of terror.

Sokolnicki rode slowly, far from the others, alone. Before him, to his right and to his left, stretched two plains—the pond and the marshes beyond the dike. In his ears hummed the depressing rustle of the reeds. His eyes looked calmly and stonily from beneath their lowered lids. Upon his lips came the venom of bitter, inward laughter. He then narrowed his eyes and thought: “And so it is I who shall lead you into this rotten bog, I. . . . I who shall fill these marshes with your bodies. . . .”

“Command, O leader! Your subordinate obeys. You were absent, O leader, when work was being done on the shores of the Po, of the Tiber, of the Rhine, on the banks of the Italian lakes, in the ravines of Tyrol, in the mountain abysses of Switzerland. You slept in eiderdown during those days, O our leader. Farewell, farewell, years of my youth! Farewell, old Swedish rampart, where with young toil I bound five thousand fascines, wove three thousand gabions, two thousand fences—all in vain. Where is my quartermastership arm-in-arm with Sulkovski? . . . Hail, shadow. . . .”

He hung his head. He leaned his hands on the pommel. Mists streamed before his eyes, shadows spun through his mind. . . .

“When shall I have cleared you, O land!

“When will you come, O day of my headship, beginning of my posthumous glory?

“But, O Heavenly Father, humble my heart. . . .

“Give me this day the word of command begotten of wisdom, with whose bulwark I may shield my brethren. Give me Thy counsel in the moment of direst need. Give me courage in the final hour when panic scatters soldiers as it might scatter children.





"Save me from death. . . . Have mercy on me, O Father!

"Thou who didst bring me safe from Offenbach and Bergen, from beneath the hail-storm of fire at Hohenlinden, from before the mouths of cannon at Salzburg, from the midst of bayonets on the Inn, at Aachen . . . Who didst shield me at Stolp, at Hayburz, at Friedland . . .

"O Father, who didst strengthen me in my crossing of the Alps, when I alone was staunch and resolute, when all, save Fiszer, had left me, when a thousand of my loyal soldiers marched without boots, two thousand were half barefoot, when half the legion was without shirts and two thousands were without clothing. . . .

"Thou givest me the grace of battle on these fields. . . .

"Protect my arm, strengthen my heart! . . ."

The second company of horse artillery crossed the entire length of the dike, passed the outlet, and entered the plain.

Raphael now spurred his horse and started away from Rashyn. Once over the dike, he rode past the entire army and drew up to the commander. Sokolnicki gave him a passing glance and without looking at him gave him his orders: "Go to the village of Falenty. A company of foot is on its way there. Have the women and children leave the village as fast as their legs will carry them. They can take all their live-stock. The men you will keep, every one of them. See to it that not a one escapes. In less than four days I shall burn the entire village to the ground. Tell them that. You are to do this immediately."

Raphael unreined his horse. In a short time he was in the centre of the village. The houses were all wooden Mazovian huts, whitewashed and roofed with thatch.

With a sonorous cry Olbromski began to summon the men. They neared timorously, unwillingly, step by step.

When he had informed them in the most unqualified and

decisive language, without the least mincing, that the women and children were to leave the village instantly, frightful tumult, cries, and wailing broke out in the village. As though springing from the ground, there appeared at his stirrups shaggy, dirty crones, half clad and sluttish, children with matted hair, repulsive, sick old men. All these whined in one voice: "Have pity on us!"

He drew his sword, drove them away with it, and pointed to the lowered bayonets of the marching company. "Whichever of you does not take out her stock, does not drive out her fowls, inside of two aves, will lose them forever. Before the end of four aves the village shall be fired from all four corners and sent up in smoke."

All now threw themselves into pig-pens, stables, barns. In the twinkling of an eye the street was teeming. Cows moored, horses whinnied, pigs squealed, hens cackled, and geese screeched. Amid curses and cruel peasants' imprecations, as dreadful as the age-old slavery of the peasant, amid prayers, adjurations, entreaties, they dragged their miserable cows, the patient givers of their food; they drove their young pigs as tenderly, as solicitously as they might drive their own begotten broods; sobbing and weeping they scurried behind their ducklings, cocks, geese. Raphael looked at this scene with vacuous eyes. A small, withered woman comes out of the nearest hut. She wraps a weeping child in a sheet and ties it on her back; she lugs a cradle which holds another. She is sobbing, she is beside herself with peasant, with animal despair. He rode down the middle of the village and, sword in hand, prodded them to swifter action. In the first cottage on the right he saw a powerful peasant, in shirt and trousers only, still half asleep, with awns of straw in his rumpled hair, throw out of the door benches, scythes, pitchforks, pots, holy pictures black with soot and grime, and with despair tear a frame filled with tiny



about the cottages revealed garden-plots already hoed and seeded.

Raphael made one more round of the village, peered here and there, and rushed back to the commander.

Sokolnicki in the mean while had already appointed and placed all his forces.

"Are they gone?" the general asked the advancing uhlan.

"As you ordered."

Taking a few platoons, Sokolnicki himself went to the deserted village. As soon as the soldiers entered the little street, they received orders to put down their arms and set to work. The soldiers under the direction of the officers, and the peasants under the direction of the soldiers, began to strip the thatched roofs with breathless haste and to carry the straw to the outskirts of the village. There they piled it in the field in a long mound, which was to be covered with earth and converted into a parapet. When all the roofs had been bared, they ordered the peasants to carry the manure which had been prepared for the soil to the rafters of the ceilings and to drench it thoroughly with water and cow-dung taken from the dung-pit. At the end of an hour of arduous labour all the walls and ceilings were overlaid with a thick coat of quaggy manure. They then brought torn-out doors, chests, benches, and barrels and made them into shelters and hiding-places for the musketry. At the same time they took apart all fences which formed solid screens in front of the village and cut down all trees which might serve to curtain the enemy in the field. At the southern end of the village, but still within its bounds, the peasants, at the point of the bayonet, were hurriedly digging two wide, deep ditches paralleling the entire length of the road.

The ground removed from these was thrown upon the piled straw, and an earthen bulwark was thus hastily made. Ladder-

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sided wagons, loaded with stones, with lumber, with dung, and carefully covered with earth, were then drawn axle-deep into these trenches. Thick poplars, brought from the woods outside the village, were pinned together in the form of a cross and driven into the ground in the empty places. The spaces between these were zealously filled with fascines, with earth, with dung, with the fences which had been torn from about the cottages in the village so that they would not hamper free and hurried passage. Some cottages were taken down completely, for the reason that they stood somewhat apart and could not be included in the fortified area.

Mounds were likewise being piled in the passageways between the huts and between the thickly built stables and barns; ditches were being dug, double palisades were being set up behind these, rafters and beams driven into the ground.

When the southern end of the village was fortified in some degree, Sokolnicki told off ten companies to destroy the road in the direction of Nadarzyn. Far and wide over the fields, all mounds, fences, and ditches were levelled with the ground, and all trees cut down. The remaining eight companies were set to other work. After barring the entrances into the village, the south in particular, there still remained a large number of poles, rafters, and door-posts, and these were now propped against the outlying cottages and thickly covered from without with wet manure. A few stables were still being dismantled, weaker spots were still being strengthened, here and there an abatis was being shored up from the outside, and earthen mounds were being heaped without end.

It was afternoon when the preparations for defence were finally completed in fair measure. After their many hours of shovelling earth, carrying dung in crude, peasant barrows, and lugging beams and loads, the soldiers were smeared with mud, perspiring, dirty, and, above all, famished. Signal was given

for rest, and the men were allowed to eat. They had just seated themselves and turned to their haversacks and canteens when a cavalry officer rushed up at a gallop. He gave a hurried report to the commander and made off at top speed in the direction of Puhaly and Mihalovice. Sokolnicki was calmly eating a lump of bread and a piece of cold meat. He sought out Olbromski and said to him: "Go along the edge of the alder-wood and the marsh as far as Puhaly. There you'll find a road leading to the cemetery. Round the cemetery from that side and push out into the open field as far as you can, upon those small hillocks opposite Rashyn. Look carefully from there in all directions. As soon as you see anything interesting, rush back and report to me."

Raphael set off in the indicated direction and was soon beyond the cemetery. The ground was lighter here, somewhat sandy. It did not stick; it was even a little dusty. The horse sped over it at a sharp gallop, while in the rider, ringing like a brazen, all powerful alarm-bell, beat the delight of life.

All his forces, all his faculties, were now strengthened and enhanced. He felt in him the peculiar rapture, the supreme excitation, the delirious joy, of danger and destruction, such joy as one might feel when on a dark night a raging fire consumes a wooden village, its close straw roofs and frenzied populace. One feels pity, terror, pain; but in the heart of things one feels joy, a rare and exhilarant pleasure. The human groans give wings to the soul, the cry of despair goads and excites it, as wind the bird, while the sight of the tall, bloody coils of smoke brings it an unholy assuagement.

At the tavern called Vygoda stood the cavalry of Roz-niecki. One could still glimpse part of it near the Nadarzyn woods. Raphael waited a considerable length of time but, seeing no movement in these troops, moved on in order to have a wider view from the flat-topped rise. In the same instant the

Polish cavalry began slowly, very slowly, to part in squadrons and to draw back in the direction of Sokolov and Komorovo. The distant colours played in the glorious April sun, in the thick, steamy haze of the drying fields. Suddenly the smoking coils trembled as though cut with a knife. A huge, bluish cloud burst from the fleeing squadrons and in the same instant a harmonious, full-toned boom rang through the country-side like a vibrant cry. Raphael gave a merry laugh. He cried out almost with delight: "Aha! At last!"

A second roar, a third. Then two almost simultaneously.

"Fine! Fine!" the youth encouraged them. "Fire away!"

As at command they fell—one, two, three, four! A moment of silence and then once again, more and more frequently. Pillars of blue smoke and beautifully round or elongated hoops of it rose heavily. The lines of Polish cavalry broke swiftly, reunited, and, retreating constantly, proceeded in an even tempo. Olbromski saw Vygoda, wholly deserted, in a flat, open field. He strained his gaze in that direction and saw, in the far-off haze, greyish, mobile clouds. Exactly as if a very distant forest, cut by glades, were drawing near across the fields.

"They are coming . . ." he whispered.

His heart shook at the sight of the countless throngs. A buzz of senseless, unconnected words floated about his ears. His eyes refused to be torn from the scene. His legs grew numb to such an extent that he could not touch his horse with the spur.

He stayed in the field until the cavalry of Rozniecki was almost out of sight and seemed only like another grey, moving forest. The cannon grew silent. But the other lines were growing clearer and clearer. He already saw the rows of bayonets flaming in a glimmering line, the motion of the legs, the colours. . . . Riders came to the front from between the columns. At first one could recognize only the

colour of the horses, but soon there appeared the colours of Palatine hussars, with companies of pandours and two wings of kaiser-hussars under the command of General Schauroth, and finally the brigade of General Speth. The entire force was sweeping upon Vygoda at a spanking gallop.

Raphael spurred Bratek and bounded off, heading straight for the alder-wood. He sought the battalions with astounded eyes. He did not see them anywhere. Not until he was within a few paces of the thickets did he see the lines drawn up amid the trees. In Falenty, too, there was not a soul. The entire place stood silent and empty. Not one living being. . . . A strangely painful sorrow touched the rider. . . . His horse sped over the trampled, hoof-riddled soil, sinking knee-deep in the clay. In the muddy road, between some trees near the palace, sat Sokolnicki astride his horse. He was holding a pair of field-glasses to his eyes. Olbromski stopped before him, checking his horse with mastery and powerful strength. The horse was catching his breath with a panting wheeze, and the rider was bathed in sweat. He felt that the wound under his arm-pit and in his side were bleeding, that the blood was soaking freely into the bandages. He was so happy. . . .

"Did you see our cavalry?" Sokolnicki asked in a heavy voice, which seemed insolent in this stillness and waiting.

"I did, sir."

"In what place?"

"Near the tavern, at the cross-roads, then in the field when it was retreating toward Sokolov."

"Did all of it go away?"

"Yes, my general."

Sokolnicki turned his spyglass in another direction. After a while he gripped it more firmly, then took it from his eyes and folded it. His face was blurred, as if frozen. He smacked

his lips. His eyes passed lazily over the grotesque caricature of the village of Falenty, over the ditches, over the abatis, the *trous-de-loup* hurriedly dug in the ground and covered with brush. They passed over the soldiers of the eighth regiment, ambushed in the wood and led to battle for the first time; they fell upon the line of old Prussian carbines with loosened flints.

A cannon-shot shattered the silence like a clap of thunder. After the first came some ten others, simultaneously. The trees shook to their inmost roots; the naked branches and delicate buds trembled like the hands of a frightened child. From Rashyn now came a concerted peal of all the Saxon cannon.

Sokolnicki signalled to Raphael with a movement of his brows and the two started down the middle of the road in the direction of Falenty. In the tree-lined road leading over the dike straight to Rashyn, they saw the Polish *tirailleurs* lying in wait at the edge of the swamp. Dense clouds of smoke were already pouring upon the clear waters of the pond and pushing their heavy mass into the bulrushes.

"They will now try to go straight across the swamp and to reach Rashyn from the field. . . . They don't know the way," Sokolnicki said, whisking his quirt over his spattered breeches and boots. "They'll find out that they can't pass, for the bog is deep, and then they'll fall upon us in Falenty. And what are you thinking of doing at this party, my worthy uhlan? Your role is ended."

Despite the great noise, Raphael heard these merrily sarcastic words. His legs were trembling under him, as on the preceding day, when he was wounded in the Nadarzyn woods. His heart was pounding with uncontrollable force, he could not catch his breath. The general flashed his white teeth.

"You are afraid, though they're not shooting at you. You

don't like this? What when they'll begin to aim at your calves?"

"I am not afraid, sir!" Raphael cried proudly and boldly.

"So I see."

A cracking racket of musket-fire broke through the booming thunder of the cannon. It came nearer and nearer, it swelled and grew in the smoke about them. Sokolnicki lifted himself in his stirrups, stretched his arms. . . .

Just then, at the turn of the road, an adjutant appeared and, saluting as he galloped, pointed to the field before the village.

The general, without waiting for his word, ordered: "By platoons!"

They left the road and drew slowly toward the battalion of Godebski. Before long they heard the command: "In two lines!"

"Platoons!"

"Ready!"

"Aim!"

"Fire!"

The battalions opened fire.

A moment later a volley of Austrian bullets whizzed past the riders, cutting off branches of alder and whistling with a drawn-out hiss over the surface of the water. Sokolnicki rode into the ranks and began to give the commands himself, gaily, loudly, cracking his whip in the air.

He wedged deeper and deeper into the rows of square caps until he reached the front of the battalion and the edge of the little wood. Raphael, who stayed behind, saw him nimbed in a cloud of blue smoke and, despite the booming shots, still heard his short commands.

Olbromski was in a state of inordinate excitement, but his limbs no longer trembled as they had a moment ago. One

thought only tormented him: why did he not have a carbine in his hand? To have a carbine! To hold it at his foot, to load it, to raise it, to point it, then over and over again in a ceaseless round. To stand in line! To listen to the command of that illustrious voice, as to the command of one's own father: two, three, four!

Suddenly one of the trees in the alder-wood gave a shrill, edgy creak, as though an unseen might had cut it to the core. In the same instant the weighty mass of a cannon-ball shot into the thick, sappy bog, rent it, and threw it into the air in two splashing clods, like a pair of monstrous lips. A powerful blast of air rushed by at Raphael's side, and with a groan the missile crashed into the dam and tore a hole in it.

Frightened, the uhlan's horse made a few pattering steps in place, folded its ears, and tossed its head.

Far off, in the smoke, in the fields over which his horse had been flying a short while ago and directly in front of him, Raphael saw blazing fires and outbursts of massed smoke. Low-flying fires and smoke, fires and smoke. After each fire the ground gave a low, dull rumble, as from the blow of a mammoth stamp.

Chaos surrounded his head. Din and thundering bellow on all sides. . . .

Nearer and nearer it came. It seemed as though the earth were cracking just beyond the little woods and as though the fire and smoke were pouring from its deep interior.

Raphael's heart became calm, and amazement took the place of fear. A curiosity—what can come of this? what more can take place?—drowned everything. Everywhere he looked, alder-trees, cut down with bullets, were falling into the marsh.

Hurled by invisible powers, limbs, branches, snippets, whole trees even, were flying through the air. From the ranks came ceaseless groans, as frightful as though someone were being

butchered with a knife. Wishing to have a better view of what was going on, Raphael touched the spur to his horse and rode off in the direction of the batteries.

The commanding officer was strolling from cannon to cannon in a lazy step. The pieces were eighteen paces apart. The leaders of the sections stood beside the limbers between the guns.

The officer in charge of the wagons and the firemasters were waiting for the commander's signal. In the distance stood the saddled horses of the cannoneers and of the section leaders.

Suddenly Sokolnicki came riding out of the smoke. His eyes sought out Soltyk and he gave him the command: "Fire!"

In a thundering voice Soltyk cried to his men: "Attention!"

At every gun the second left-hand fireman struck the match against his left arm to shake off the tip of ashes and brought it in his outstretched arm within four inches of the touch-hole.

"Fire!"

They touched the matches to the priming and drew back into their places. The four guns shook and recoiled. A cloud of smoke enfolded them.

Suddenly a soldier in a tall cap with white cordons appeared at Raphael's stirrup and raised to him a pair of eyes so terrible, so wildly inverted, that Raphael roused as from a dream. The other pushed him with the butt of his carbine and drove him into the midst of the artillery horses. One of the artillerymen, in an open coat, beneath which showed a bloody velvet waistcoat, shouted at him; another raised his sword. Raphael gave the reins a violent tug and rode off to the right, but, he had gone only a few steps when his horse stumbled on a heap of bodies.

Olbromski bent down and peered through the obscuring smoke to see what manner of men these were, when all at once his horse leaped and threw his whole body as if terrified by the horror of the scene. He gave a rattling snort, as once the dying Baska had done, reared, and then fell abruptly on his front knees. Raphael tore his legs from the stirrups and came to the ground. The horse was trembling in every limb. His hips contracted, his skin grew taut. He bit the ground and licked it with his tongue. Raphael noticed only now that the animal's entrails were flowing out and that it was bleeding profusely. Raphael walked away, wading straight ahead, without the least notion of the direction in which he was going. A few moments later he found himself in the ranks of the *voltigeurs*. His eyes caught the familiar colours—the yellow collars, the yellow-green bands, the green feathers on the hats.

They were standing in the swamp, almost up to their knees in water. They were loading and shooting without command. Raphael stumbled over hummocks, stumps, and branches, crawled over bodies, yet, urged on by a compelling curiosity, pressed on through the *mêlée*. He did not see the faces. In this way he came to the platoons which were fighting within a stone's throw of the enemy. They were less than a hundred paces in front of him. Smoke obscured everything. Behind every larger tree lurked a man, loading, shooting, loading, shooting.

Raphael picked up a carbine which was lying on the ground and stepped into the ranks.

"Fall in line!" the young officer kept shouting in an attempt to form a column and to rush forward with it.

His efforts were in vain. Men fell to the ground at every shot. The bullets came like hail. From the thicket poured pale-faced soldiers with frightened eyes. They were the bat-

talions of Colonel Baron Pabelkoven. In close formation, through the trees as far as possible, they forged ahead. Raphael looked in complete stupefaction at their tall caps and the white belts crossed over their chests.

"Why, it is they!" So much he managed to comprehend.

At sight of the enemy the soldiers of Godebski's battalion seized their arms and rushed forward. Swept by a mad frenzy, Raphael went with them.

They fell on the infantry with peasant fury. They stabbed without military form, vulgarly, with bayonets; they clubbed with the stocks of their muskets. . . .

Raphael, who did not know how to use the bayonet, seized an old Prussian blunderbuss by the end of the barrel and began to smite with all the strength in his arms. Following his example, the others did the same. Seeing himself in the centre of a throng, Raphael began, not to command, but to order as a nobleman might order peasants at a fire: "Fight there! They're Germans! Give it to them!" They pushed into the ranks, which bristled with bayonets; they threw themselves upon the smoking, blood-smeared barrels.

Their valiant zeal did not last long. In a short while they had to give way. The Austrians poured upon them from the height of a sloping eminence; they came in a thick, close column, numbering three thousand men.

The *voltigeurs* were retreating, sinking deeper and deeper in the yielding mud of the swamp, returning blows, firing back, strewing the field with dead. The Polish fusiliers were drawing back in greater and greater confusion. Panic was slowly falling upon them, like a heavy and steadily increasing rain. In vain did the officers brandish their swords and goad to battle.

Raphael found himself in the midst of a pressing, crushing, terror-stricken mob. Up to their waists in the mire, they backed

above, from hay-lofts, from behind rafters, from corners, holes, fissures, clefts. The village was already surrounded from three sides. The entire second regiment of infantry was marching upon it in solid formation.

Boards were already being torn out, abatis ruined, beams pulled out. Prince Joseph summoned the first battalion of the first regiment, which was firing steadily, together with the artillery, and with twelve companies attacked the besiegers of the village. In the course of a few minutes the besiegers were routed with the bayonet and driven into the field. At the same time three light pieces brought to Falenty from Rashyn augmented the fire of the artillery. The fusiliers shut up in the village, commanded by Sokolnicki himself, greeted the Prince with cheers of praise.

The Prince mounted and, surrounded by his staff, rode through the ranks. The reserves now came to the front; the nine guns were brought together and placed near the Falenty manor-house. From here they began to fire unsparingly.

The Prince moved back to Rashyn, his base of operations. As he slowly crossed the dike, bullets whistled about him like a shower of hail. Sokolnicki gave command to repair the ruined fortifications of Rashyn under the enemy's fire and, working on the same principle as in the morning, sought to draw up his three battalions in order to spare his men. But when he had done this, and the Austrian infantry had withdrawn into the fields, a rain of six-pound balls suddenly began to pelt his artillery and foot.

A fresh division of Austrian forces had come to strengthen the advance guard. Four and twenty cannon were roaring now and six new battalions added their fire to the old five. Only nine cannon answered them. Raphael was within a short distance of them. He heard the roar and rumble of the heaving, reeling guns. The entire battery writhed in spasms of

and turned all his attention to the defence and safe possession of the passage over the dam. The entire impetus of the Austrian artillery was now turned upon the village. While the infantry of Mohr was making its second sally into the woods, tearing the footmen of Godebski with bayonets, the Austrian cannon at the back of this infantry were turned to the east, at right angles to Falenty, and fired at the remaining peasant dwellings.

Raphael came to this spot with the columns commanded by Sieravski. . . . Before he knew it, the uhlan found himself in a crowd, amid the barns. He drew breath. The rain of missiles was not so thick here. For a moment. . . . On the roofs of the huts, in the barns, behind torn-out gates, sat, stood, kneeled, and lay soldiers, answering the fire of the Austrian infantry, which was storming the village from the south. They had ammunition for a short time still. Each soldier had fired sixty shots. When the cannon-balls shattered a barn, loosened its rafters, upheaved its groundsels, or tore its posts from the ground, the soldiers moved in a body to another, to a third; they crawled to the top of the dismantled roofs and fought anew. Sokolnicki himself formed the parties. He stood in the middle of the village road and directed the defence. From there through the northern, uncovered end of the defile he saw his freshly made reserves and the artillery. A small party of soldiers was continually bringing water in buckets and tubs and putting out the fires. Fires were bursting out now here, now there. When the artillery, which had been a target for the enemy's fire, began to recede to the rear of the palace, toward the dam, the entire force of the twenty-four assaulting guns was turned upon Falenty.

The fire became hellish.

Beams, girders, laths were cracking and breaking, splitting

and flying into the air in splinters and shavings. Walls caved in and bellied and fell to the ground full length and breadth. They were protected from fire by the wet dung and earth. The village was changing into a huge pile of wooden ruins drenched with cow-dung, a towering pyre of fallen dwellings. The soldiers drew up behind it and still fired on the enemy, who was in the field and was steadily drawing closer from the south and east.

Raphael took up the carbine of a fallen grenadier, put his cartridge-box about his waist, and, stooping behind a projecting wall, began to load and fire. A wild lust pulsed in him, like the charge in the heated barrel. He forgot where he was and what was happening to him. At times it seemed to him that he was striking at the jaws of the wolf in the snow embankment and that the animal's fangs were in his chest.

He heard Sokolnicki shouting in a hoarse voice: "Pour it on, brother, pour it on! Watch your cartridges! Ram it in tight! Don't spare them! Here you are, you rascally cowards! You've come all this distance, you German swine! Is this your land, you robber? Smite them, brothers, don't spare their hides!"

Here, there, rang out cries of alarm, groans of despair. There now began to fall upon the village, or rather upon its shattered bones, flaming, mortar bomb-shells. These bombs, upon bursting on the ground or in the air, threw blazing shafts of fire in all directions. They were large, hollow balls of iron, filled with powder. They had an opening stopped with a long plug, which held the fuse.

The fire was spreading to the piles of wood, to the uniforms of living and dead. They tried to quench it with water, to smother it with dung, but the shells, filled with artificial combustibles, came more and more thickly, like flocks of fiery

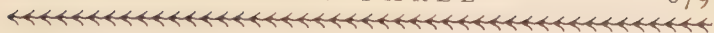
birds. A hundred fires started and went out in the same instant. Wide sheets of flame were in front and behind, overhead and on the ground. Eight-pound shells were shattering the remains of the rubbish.

Sokolnicki took out a round watch and looked about him. He rubbed his fists over his eyes, which were full of sand, smoke, and soot. He expelled a long, wheezing breath. He snapped his fingers. It was nearly five in the afternoon. He whispered to the nearest officer, just over his ear: "Battalion to the rear—with the right wing—March!"

The *voltigeurs* came out of the fire and smoke. They were black, smudged; their uniforms were smouldering. They pushed through the northern exit of the village and crowded out upon the road at the side of the palace. With great difficulty the officers drew up their sections and the files alongside the cannon.

The supply wagons drove out upon the dike under cover of the two battalions which were being pushed out of the alder-wood in a solid pack. These battalions were still bickering with the enemy. . . . Shots were still falling. The cannon climbed to the dam one by one. The infantrymen pulled on the spokes, on the axles, the cascabels, helping the wounded horses. Most of the active cannoneers had fallen under the fire of the powerful enemy. Of the horses scarcely half were left.

Sokolnicki drew up the decimated battalion of Godebski. He stepped into the ranks and, barricading the approach with an undaunted breast, covered the retreat of the guns. His soldiers moved not only over the dike, but beside it, through the swamp, up to their waists in mud. The enemy poured after them step by step and followed in their tracks through the same bog. Here, amid stumps, brush, clumps of last year's



The evening glow was fading over the smouldering ruins of Falenty. The waking breeze brought groans from the dam, from the swamp, from the shore. A white mist, rising slowly from the rustling osiers, enfolded these voices of death like a kindly, gently falling shroud.

Two thousand Austrians perished on the dam; over a thousand Poles lay dead in the alder.

The night was well advanced when Raphael emerged from the fighting ranks in tattered uniform, without cap, wet to the shoulders. He walked blindly over the ploughed fields in the direction of Opacha. He was sure that he would still find there his bed of the preceding night. Rashyn was so crowded that there was no room in it to stand, let alone to lay one's head. As he walked away, he saw the wounded being carried into the church and houses. The dead were being laid in the fields along the road.

Olbromski was all aflame.

His wound of yesterday was twisting him with pain. He felt his bruises and bayonet-blows only now. Jets of fire were in his eyes and head, though he was shivering with cold. He was dragging a load of mortal pain, carrying in his eyes the sight of that entire field; he had in his arms those squirming heaps of bodies on the dam. . . .



42. In Warsaw

AFTER spending the night in a shed in the Jewish suburb of Warsaw, near the municipal gallows, Raphael woke toward day-break. The shed stood at a considerable distance from the road, yet he heard the rattle and clang of rolling cannon, of wagons, of marching infantry. He crawled out of his lair and learned from passing soldiers that these were Polish troops and that the Polish forces were retreating along the entire front. He was astounded. When he was leaving Rashyn at the beginning of the night, the entire army was bubbling with pride over the achieved victory. And now it was retreating from the field of battle in full force! How frightful was the rumble of the cannon on that nocturnal road of retreat! How heavy, weary, and sepulchral was the step of the retreating soldier!

"The Saxons left us!" they explained to Raphael from the ranks.

"German and German will always be brothers!"

"The scurvy Saxon hounds! They went back on us right in the middle of the battle."

"Twelve hundred men, a hundred and fifty hussars, twelve cannon, their entire three battalions—they got everything together, and off they went. . . ."

Raphael mingled with the ranks and moved on with them. He asked everywhere for the brigade of Sokolnicki. It was morning when he finally learned that the general had been appointed commander of the left wing and that he was covering the flood plain of Powisle from the side of Vilanov beyond the Cherniakov and Mokotov tollbars. Olbromski turned in that direction with a small division of foot-soldiers which was forging on apart from the principal line.

At sunrise came the sound of a distant fusillade. A small mounted division flew by in the morning mist and plunged into the plain of Vilanov. On a rise in the vicinity of Mokotov Raphael was stopped by a citizen's guard and with great ceremony taken to the officer in command of the sentry post. This old warrior would give no definite answer to Raphael's questions about Sokolnicki and told him to wait in the guard camp at the edge of the Lazienki Park. A veritable little town had sprung up here since the preceding afternoon. Of tables, doors, shutters, benches, and chairs the defenders of the city had constructed a sort of barracks, huts, tents, and tabernacles. They slept in these, not only the soldiers themselves, but even their families, which had brought them supplies and ammunition. At the moment when Raphael came, the guard had already risen. The commanders were marshalling the drowsy citizens in battle formation as from the direction of Piasechno came sounds of steadily approaching carbine-shots. Raphael entered one of the improvised tents, crouched down under a door which had been torn out somewhere, together with its hinges, and fell into a state of dreaming. His head, after the experience of the preceding day, was still full of a whirring tumult. A strong tug on the arm tore him from a short sleep. A strange officer was waking him and summoning him to the general.

Sokolnicki was near by, on horseback. He was spattered with lumps of clay up to his epaulets and the plume of his hat. His half-boots and amaranth trousers were invisible under the mud. His face was black and sullen with weariness. His horse was covered with foam. It was steaming profusely.

When Raphael, with a bow, came up to his stirrup, the general began to banter him: "Is this how you are behaving, my adjutant? I must look for you in the tents of this female infantry! What cap is this you have on your head?"

When, for the last time, he lifted himself from the ground and raised his eyes, he saw before him the iron bars of a garden surmounted with tangled, still withered vines of wild grapes and, in the depths of the garden, the façade of a small palace and a balcony. There rose before him a closed door, windows with drawn curtains, a flight of stone steps on the left of the balcony, beds of last year's flowers. . . .

A small detachment of the guard noticed Raphael huddled against the garden fence and took him with it. He followed them without resistance. He was unable to reply to their question whether he had a family, relatives, or friends in Warsaw, so crushed was he by the intensity of his last emotion. But at length he recalled the house of Prince Gintult and asked to be taken there.

The palace gate was open and in the courtyard stood a dozen or more peasant carts. Poor, scrawny horses munched their oats and hay in bags or from baskets placed beneath the windows. The main entrance, formerly always tightly closed, now stood wide open. Various poor and humble folk were going in and out through the imposing portal. The two guards led Raphael into the hall, where they were received by the old valet from Grudno. He did not recognize Raphael in the least and turned to him with poorly concealed ill will.

In the lower salons and in the splendid library now stood beds and beds and beds, and in them groaned wounded men. The quiet, luxurious rooms, converted into operating-rooms, were flooded with pools of blood, filled with horrible cries of men being operated on, writhing in convulsions under the saw and the lancet. In others dying men were breathing their last. Several young surgeons in bloody shirts were moving busily between the beds.

"And here is another wounded . . ." a voice spoke at the door.

and bent his stiff neck in solicitous bows. Soon came the Prince with a surgeon. While the latter was dressing Raphael's wound, Gintult seated himself at the foot of his bed and indifferently watched the doctor's activities. The surgeon soon left, saying that the invalid could leave his bed in two or three days.

"I am glad," said Gintult, "that you are not more seriously ill, for in that case we should have to part almost at once."

Raphael did not grasp his meaning.

"I shall be obliged to leave Warsaw," continued the Prince, "and I should like to have you for a travelling-companion."

"I am sorry, but I am now bound by military duty. I must return to camp as soon as I am well."

"That's just where I am going."

"Your Excellency is entering the army?"

"Exactly."

"I am very happy to hear it!"

"You have no reason to be. I am not going to camp out of a desire to fight the Austrians. You should understand me. I am going simply from a sense of duty. . . . I don't know if I can still speak with you as formerly. You did such a strange thing—you left without one word of announcement."

Olbromski kept a sullen silence.

"However, I did not come here to reproach you in any manner. God be with you. I am glad that you are returning to health."

"I cannot now tell you everything which occasioned my sudden departure; I can tell you only this much—"

"Do not trouble."

"My father summoned me—"

Gintult smiled indulgently. "Your father wrote to me after your departure asking where you were."



43. In the Old Manor

WHEN, in the first days of June, General Schauroth crossed from the left to the right bank of the Vistula, Raphael Olbromski happened to be in the throng of officers composing the staff of Prince Poniatovski. He had been sent by General Sokolnicki with a detailed report.

It was afternoon of a cloudy day when the throng of staff dandies with whom Raphael was journeying came out of the water-side forests which lay in a half-circle about Stoklosy. The distant forest landscapes were blue in token of fair weather, although the nearer tracts were still steeped in a moist, steel-grey haze. The entire land, decked in fields of grain, was laden with moisture and as yielding as water. Muddy rills of water still gleamed in the furrows. Narrow, field lanes, which on another day the eye would scarcely have detected between the hides of grain, were now silver with threads of restless water. The rain had stopped. Grey-brown clouds, full of white pits and holes, trailed low in the heavens. The rain having ceased, the deep, myriad-tinted, drenched grasses of the meadows burst forth in a riot of flowers.

The group of officers rode on, talking about the events of the day. Raphael, who was but poorly acquainted with the group and who had not participated in the action and now, having carried out his instructions, had no definite function, galloped indifferently at the side of the road. He saw Stoklosy in the distance. Since he could not be there, he contented himself with looking at the changes in the sowing of the fields, in the crowns of the trees, in the colours of the fences and roofs. At a turn in the road, at the foot of a hillock, he happened to glance to the right—and, lo, less than a stone's throw away, he saw none other than Stephen Trepka in his

very own person. The "delegate" was on horse, riding toward the highway over a narrow, field path. His horse was actually standing in place, as he moved his legs only sufficiently to have it seem that the rider was not staring idly, but that he was going about his business. Raphael well knew that indifferent, half-sad, half-derisive expression, that dull stare as of a simple churl. His heart quickened at the sight of the bent figure in the homespun smock, in the heavy boots, at the sight of the aged face, grey, stern, and sad. He could not resist. He spurred his horse over the wide ditch, into the young grain, up the hillock. Leaping, he sang out from the bottom of his heart:

"My eyes met yours, but not for long,
For ere I knew that I was seen,
Your gaze, indifferent to my prayer,
Turned coldly to the lifeless wall. . . ."

Trepka pulled his head still farther into his shoulders and checked his horse. He looked askance. Even when he recognized the officer as his old companion, he did not change the expression of his face. He bowed to him with an air of humble yet cunning politeness.

"I see you do not recognize old friends!"

"But I do, I do," Trepka mumbled with friendly, with obsequious flattery.

"But I saw—"

"My eyes are poor, I do not see at once."

"Are you riding out for espials, scanning the national army out of your rye? . . . Who could tell about you? Perhaps you're keeping with the enemy—"

"Softly, softly, Mr. Olbromski—Captain—"

"Why is Lieutenant Olbromski to speak softly?"

"You will shout, my dear lieutenant, and ride away on

Suddenly he asked: "You'll surrender Sandomierz too, I suppose, or what?"

"How surrender?" the young man bellowed at him rudely. "Not if the sky rains pitchforks, not if the entire city falls into ruins. Sokolnicki will not give them one brick without a struggle. Not he! He took it with his fist and will hold it with his fist!"

"Certainly, it would seem that one ought to hold it to the end. The place is rich. 'Four ruined gates, nine convents and a house or two. . . .'"

Anger swept Raphael to the marrow of his bones. He realized now how different a man he had become, how far he had freed himself from the libertine thought-forms of this eccentric. He felt that he had a conception of the whole, while the other was still engrossed in his favourite fractions. The battles seen beneath the walls of Sandomierz, the storming, the bombardment of the old churches, the work of fortification after the taking of the city—all this came before him like a dear treasure of the soul. He grew silent and, together with Trepka, started swiftly after the cortège of officers, which had now turned toward Olshyna.

"Are we going to Olshyna?" Raphael asked on their way.

"So I heard. I met a stable-man here in the field who was going to town after supplies. The Prince has taken quarters in the manor-house, under old Cedro's roof. For a while only, of course, for *periculum in mora*. Old Cedro is giving a dinner for the staff. If only the Devil won't send Schauroth in a yellow and black gravy between the roast and the dessert. You ought to be at that feast, my dear lieutenant. The old man is coming out in splendid style. He wants to show what he can do, even though his calves are trembling under him, even though he's running a heavy risk—"

"You're going there nevertheless?"

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“Yes, as a member of the household of His Worth Mr. Cedro.” He glanced with his cold, derisive eyes and burst out in a loud guffaw: “My heavens! you’re an officer of sternest calibre, Raphael Olbromski! What a horse! What posture! You were not so cunning once. . . . You will go far! Well, that’s good.”

“What do you think? We’ve both come to amount to something, Christopher and I. We rule the world! Instead of sitting here behind manure-heaps and making laws with you. . . .”

The instant Christopher’s name was uttered, old Trepka shrivelled and huddled weakly into himself. In a short moment he turned into a mouldy and aged numb-skull. He sat on his horse with lowered head and hanging arms.

“Christopher, you say?”

He moved his quirt through the air, once, twice. He pointed with it to something in the field. Then on the other side. When he turned and looked once more at his companion, the latter saw an almost childish face.

“Chris is not here,” he said softly, as though he were telling a sad secret.

“No, he is not here, for he is out in the world. He is fighting.”

“Fighting—”

“Did you have any news from him?”

“He wrote one short letter from Paris, and then nothing, not one word. We had a French newspaper with the information that his regiment was in Spain. And that’s all we know. . . .”

They rode into the wide, birch avenue which led to the manor. The old trunks, black at the base, snow-white higher up, veined and clouded like marble, met the eyes like hospitably open gates, like spacious halls. The hanging leaves



spoke in the faintest of whispers and told a legend of what nothing, save them, will tell of bygone feelings. They had gone a few hundred paces through the avenue in silence when Raphael looked behind him. He had an illusion, a half-illusion, a vague bodily sensation, that someone was riding in the distance at a headlong gallop.

He did not wish to confess to himself that Christopher was in his thoughts. He had an uncomfortable, loathsome feeling at being occupied thus. The outer end of the avenue gave out on the spreading fields like a tall window rounded at the top. Dark reaches of wheat were spread there in a matchless landscape. Willy-nilly, they began to chatter about the crops, the harvest, the rains; and talking thus, like two neighbouring sowers of buckwheat who are interested in nothing in the world except the happy harvest of their crops, they rode into the manor yard. How changed it was! It was full of horses in military harness, but lightly unbuckled, of soldiers eating hurriedly in the corners, full of military uproar. The windows of the house were flung apart; the door to the porch was wide open. There were sounds of music, of song, of applause. Lackeys and orderlies ran in and out of the house.

The dinner, hurriedly laid for the Prince and his retinue, had already ended. The commander, with a few generals, was in the garden arbour, where they were holding some kind of council. The young officers filled the large salon and the adjoining rooms. Just as Trepka, leading Raphael by the arm, stepped upon the balcony, the old pantaleon burst once more into melody. The delegate ushered his companion into the salon, while he himself tiptoed through a series of hallways to the terrace which overlooked the garden. Departing hastily, he pointed to his ultra-agrarian costume and his fiercely spattered boots. Raphael slipped into the salon. He passed his eyes over the gathered company.

One of the youngest of the young officers was playing. Mary was standing beside the instrument. The same droop of the head, the same expression of face; eyes half closed. . . . She raised her head and began to sing:

*"La nuit tombait dans la prairie,  
"L'Écho dormait dans le vallon,  
"Près du ruisseau chantait Amélie. . . ."*

This was no longer the singing of the young girl which he had heard years before, but the beautiful voice of a young, strong, and robust woman. She passed a pair of lovely eyes over the gathering of men. Joy of life, strength of heart, and a lust of happiness showed in the look, rang in the voice. The song complained before the whole kindred world of youth, as before a penetrating, knowing, and just tribunal, of the emptiness and sadness of that house, of the bitterness of her young and solitary years. She complained, not in word, but in sound, in a series of wondrous musical accents, and the entire circle of youths listened to her in rapt concentration of soul. Not one of the listeners remained indifferent to these rending plaints, to these lonely voices and cries. But suddenly a tremor shook the melodious song, the tones rocked with highest ecstasy. . . . Raphael raised his eyes and saw, plunged into him, the two diamond arrows of Mistress Mary's eyes. He felt with rapture that it was he the old song was greeting with that ecstatic transport. . . . A smile of joy, a perfumed halo of happiness, bloomed forth on the lips of the songstress.

Some moments later Raphael happened to glance to the right. There, in a small group of the most distinguished of the Prince's followers, sat the elder Cedro. The last few years had changed him very little. The same beautifully aged face, the same elegant motion of the head, the same posture of the

hands and feet. He sat in an arm-chair with the grace of a nimble dandy, he smiled tenderly or graciously, he held his trunk and legs stiffly and correctly. A look at once indulgent and lofty fell upon the guests from the imperious eyes. But suddenly, at the joyous strains of the song, when the sighs of all the youth had floated off in their path, the old lips began to stretch sideward like the rubber of a torn ball, the nose almost touched the pointed chin, the eyelids dropped and filled with blood. The hands, folded so ornamentally on the arms of the chair, did not tremble; the crossed legs did not move; only bitter tears, great drops of sorrow, began to drip from beneath the lids and fall upon the knees. No one, with the exception of Raphael, noticed them. The song ended and was followed by frantic applause and prayers for another. As Mary, outwardly refusing and reluctant, sought new music in the portfolio, old Cedro slipped out of the crowd.

He walked gropingly, smiling graciously, seeing no one. He slipped past the gathered guests, making bows to right and left, bows directed at one knew not whom, and came out on the garden terrace. There he reeled feebly on to a bench. He raised his eyes and perceived Trepka sitting beside him.

"Ah, it is you!" he hissed out with fury, with rancour as piercing as a knife plunged into the heart.

"I indeed."

"You took my child! You ruined my son with your sophistries!"

"Calm yourself, sir, calm yourself."

"So many of them have come, so many are here! The house is full. Healthy, ruddy, happy, all— Only he is not here. I am having them all entertained in his honour, but what is all that to me? Chris is not here—"

"He too will come."



voice, "another land, not mine or yours, but ours, a communal, collective land. The young man dreams of this great land which does not belong to him, the old man dreams of the small land which belongs only to him—let it be the very smallest, if only it is his alone—until there comes a time in the life of man when neither the one nor the other any longer attracts him."

"You lured him away from my house with these super-wise follies! You talked him into revolt!" Cedro began to lament anew.

"It was not I that spurred him on, it was the awakening, rousing force of life. I am to blame, it is true, for not having stopped him. But I did not try to stop him, I confess that."

"I knew that it was you who did it! You and no one else! Why did you not bind him with words, since you had gained such a hold on him? If at least he had fought here, like these who now fill my house with joy. . . . But where is he, what is he doing?"

"I did not hold him back," Trepka was saying softly, half to his listener, but actually to himself, "for I could not. I lost consciousness of things. I know nothing now. Nothing, nothing! All my remedies have failed me, all my hopes have crashed, deceiving my soul. I saw the debasement of all instincts, the gradual disappearance of the sense of tribal existence. The feeling of disgrace has eaten me all."

They were walking downhill into the lowest part of the garden, arm-in-arm, their heads bowed, and continued to whisper their colloquy of senile consolations, both bent, old, and powerless with grief.

"What good is all this to me in my misery?" Cedro continued to mutter.



"The better elements had to wake and plunge into the gory bath. Could he have stayed behind and governed his piece of land? Recall his soul. . . . He, Christopher! Think only. . . . He, Christopher!"

## 44. Sandomierz

RAPHAEL OLBROMSKI reached the Vistula just in time to cross the pontoon bridge to Sandomierz. The bridge was removed the very next morning and the bridge fortifications completely demolished. In consequence of his position as third adjutant of General Sokolnicki, Raphael was constantly crossing and recrossing Sandomierz and its fortified environs in every direction. Old Sandomierz! He knew it from his childhood days fully as well as he knew the garden and stack-yard in Tarniny. And so he spurred away, now to the Pepper hills, where the soldiers making the field-works unearthed pagan urns in old Slavonic ruins, now into the fields about the Kamien chapter-house; a few moments later he would be seen making off to the west to carry orders to the fortalices near the castle and to the outposts behind St. Jacob's convent, St. Paul's Church, St. Joseph's, and St. Michael's, and the Benedictine nunnery.

The triangle formed by the above-named churches, joined to the city by impassable ravines, was being fortified more heavily than all else. The final work of fortifying these places was being done, under the orders of the commander-in-chief, by Prince Gintult. He had brought to Sandomierz a battalion of men, drawn, for the most part, from his estates on the other side of the Vistula. These men were as yet without arms and adequate uniforms; they had been taken as they stood, in their peasant clothes. The Prince commanded them himself, not as an officer, for he did not join the army, but as a civilian director and engineer.

The works in the city were being directed by Sokolnicki himself. He worked tirelessly at the extension of the ancient city-wall and covered the breaches which were beyond re-





pair with boards. Beyond the wall, palisades were still being driven into the slope of the hill and the eighteen-pound Austrian cannon were being hauled into place.

Prince Gintult was especially solicitous about one of the extramural convents—the church and convent of St. Jacob. Raising there far-lying *ouvrages extérieurs*, he spent long hours, as he watched his men, in contemplation of the ancient Romanesque lines of the church, of its brick walls covered with a six-hundred-year-old patina of time. Digging thus in the depths of these wheat-covered hillocks, where ages before, in the beginning, stood the city of Sandomierz, they came constantly upon traces of walls of stone-lined fosses, upon remains of palisades. The spade of the digger uncovered sunken entrances to caverns. In their depth and murk glistened grey mounds of bones.

Prince Gintult, the work of the day being done, would descend into these underground passages at night, alone, a rope tied about his waist. He found particular delight in touching the sleeping ashes of the past with his hand, in clasping them with timorous eyes. Pushing on into the gloom of the subterranean vaults, led on by the mobile circle of light, by the timid ray of the lantern, he deluded himself voluntarily that he was inspecting the secret paths of death, that he was examining the future annals of extinct man. He found a rapturous joy in these illusions. Walking in the depths of these caverns, he seemed to become incomprehensible even to himself, he seemed to himself half-man, half-spirit, he had a sensation of having lost his mind. During the day, amid the most pressing work, he listened with keen interest to the gossip of the peasants about these caverns, to their tales of the underground passageways, to legends covered with a rubble of ignorance, overgrown, like the caverns themselves, with the weed and grass of the workaday world. Slowly there formed

in his soul a kindly acceptance of the reality of the light which men had so often seen on dark nights above St. Jacob's Church. The Prince laughed good-naturedly, happily, and sincerely as he listened to the story of the Swedish colonel who had rushed pell-mell from the convent upon seeing the brilliant light which poured from the windows at midnight and hearing the unearthly chorus of the forty-six Dominicans who had been murdered more than five hundred years before. He would tell himself then that surely there was nothing more just on earth than the judgment of a miraculous legend. . . . How profound, how deeply rooted, seemed to him the story of the eternal song, of the endless nightly vigil in the little chapel where the murdered men had prayed in life! The moss-covered walls of the Dominican pile began to beam for the Prince with the pure radiance, the ethereal glow, which surrounds the virtue of courage, the honour of oaths inviolate, the martyr's grave. Between his soul and that wall, jutting sheerly from the crest of the hillock, between his soul and the little cupola of the chapel cell of Hyacinthe there developed in this time something like an indisruptable vein.

Not infrequently Raphael would come upon the Prince sitting at the foot of a mound, upon a jutting beam on the spot where in the thirteenth century the Dominicans had had their wine-cellars, and contemplating the charming northern gate, the ornate semicircular arches of the windows, the set-offs of the frontal. Nor was he unaware of the Prince's efforts to shield this convent as much as possible both from the fire of the enemy and from a possible bombardment from the city. The mounds of earth on the hillocks were highest here and the parapets raised higher than elsewhere.

Upon his return from his expedition across the Vistula, Raphael saw the Prince more rarely. He spent all his time with the general. On the twelfth of June he was in the cupola of

the collegiate church and watched the course of the battles at Dombrova. He sat in the vent-holes on the roof of the Jesuit college, scanning the position of the Austrians and the retreat of the Polish armies. Nightly vigils, days in the saddle without food and rest, had wasted the adjutant. And so on the night of the 15th of June, in the course of the conference with the Austrian envoy, he decided to have a good sleep. He fell into a little room in the priest's house, which stood back in the yard. The building was mouldy and very old and its habitants had abandoned it long ago. Olbromski threw himself in his clothes upon a bed and broke into loud snoring. But he did not sleep long. Some time before midnight he was wakened by a frenzied racket. Through the open window one could see hosts of fire-balls thrown upon Sandomierz. These balls flew about like sky-rockets on a festive day; they burst in the air with deafening peals and hurled fire in all directions. The half-wakened officer heard cries of alarm just beyond the wall. Willing or no, he had to rise. He was just lifting himself from the bed when a huge sail of fire burst out in front of him. Fire in the yard! A granary or storehouse of some kind was burning a few paces from the window.

When Raphael left the house, its roof was already in flames. A sudden gust of wind—and the flaming tongues touched the roofs of the houses in the street of Our Lady. Old, dry, black, bent, various-shaped roofs took fire one after another, quietly, obediently, solemnly. All their angles, eaves, lookouts, vent-holes, and apertures now stood out like the sharp, distinct, and peculiarly obvious features of a corpse. So many years had they sheltered poor, crowded human life from wind and rain! And now they themselves, exposed to ravage in a single moment, were perishing with death as sudden and as terrible as that of human beings. The torrent of fire leaped from roof to roof, poured from one slope to another. Here

and there some terror-stricken person darted from the yard. Here and there a sound of weeping burst out and soon died, as if choked by the fire. A cry now and then, and after it a deathly silence more dreadful than the cry. It was filled with the roar and crash of the all-powerful fire. A crackling of flames, as if of living bones being broken by a hangman's tongs, as if of a tyrannical execution. A feeling of inexpressible grief tugged at Raphael's heart. He had spent his years of childhood and youth under the shelter of these old hallways, of these great, black roofs grown into one and resembling mountain saddles and ridges. Now all were dying powerlessly before his eyes. He took off his cap and sighed bitterly, like a child. But he recovered instantly.

It grew light on the Sandomierian hills, as in broad day. In the distance, beneath the fiery sky, rose the black skeleton of the Recollect Church, burned in the first attack, and the charred ruins of St. Adalbert's. White masses of smoke spread over the city and began to coil above the peaks of the churches. People had vanished from the market-places, from the streets, from the houses, from the surface of the earth. They were engulfed by the buried cellars, caverns, and galleries, by the underground city of fear.

It was almost an hour past midnight when the Austrian cannon on the left bank of the Vistula were put into play. Olbromski left the market-place and made his way to the northern breastwork. He knew that he would find his commander there. Sokolnicki was there indeed, giving out orders. At the moment when Raphael reached the work, the air was rent by a salvo of the eighteen-pound guns which had been captured from the Austrians and now, stationed beside the castle and at the Cracow gate, were pointed at the enemy's columns marching over the Jagiellonian highway upon the second and third battery—in other words, upon the castle and

the gate. Raphael was ordered to get a report from the fourth battery, located at St. Paul's Church.

At the crossing of the trenches he met two companies of grenadiers under the command of Colonel Weyssenhoff, rushing at full speed to St. Paul's Hill. He rode on with them and came into the maelstrom of a most heated battle. The enemy column had reached the angles of the fortifications about St. Paul's Church.

Weyssenhoff's grenadiers formed into a column in the church cemetery. Softly they opened the gate. Their serried host marched out to the breach and waited there with levelled bayonet. Scarcely had the Austrians managed to glance at the interior of the groundwork when the grenadiers fell upon them with furious valour. A murderous battle arose on the parapets and in the ditches. Confined at first to the breach in the fourth battery, it spread gradually in both directions until it reached a point beyond St. Jacob's Church at one end, and the convent of the Benedictine nuns at the other. Three strong Austrian columns, or about five thousand men, heavily drunk with whiskey, had neared this convent several times, until they finally captured it, together with four cannon.

Houses, sheds, barns, and cottages burning on the outskirts, and the huge conflagration in the heart of the city made everything as apparent as by broad daylight.

Raphael worked with a number of other officers at the cannon of the fourth battery until the moment when the attack was completely repulsed. Seeing that the position was now safe, he strode off in the direction of the St. Jacob gorge in order to report to the general. As he was passing the church, someone called him by name. It was Prince Gintult, standing at the portal and beckoning to him. The church was illuminated by the rampant flames which raged in the city.

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Gintult's shadow, a huge, long, mobile shape, floated over the entire wall and fell upon the field of young barley which teemed lushly just outside the enclosure. Inside the church lurked Gintult's peasants, holding their Austrian muskets loaded with Austrian bullets taken from the town hall only a short while before.

"Where are you going?" shouted the Prince.

"To the general."

"With good news?"

"Yes."

"Remember to ask him to spare my St. Jacob!"

"What can I do—"

"Remember, remember!"

Without listening further, Raphael ran down into the ditch, turned to the left, and hurried uphill through fragrant gardens, between little houses perched atop the hilly ridge like swallows' nests. He found the general at the main battery. Sokolnicki had just given the command: "Fire a breach in the Benedictine convent!"

The huge siege-cannon began to hurl their shells at the convent and into the churchyard, at the walls of the cemetery and the belfries seized by the Austrians. At the same moment his adjutant officers came running with the report that strong columns were storming the entire stretch from the walls of St. Mary Magdalene's Convent to the castle, that they were advancing both along the edge of the Vistula and along the crest of the Pepper Hills.

As soon as Raphael emerged from the ditch into the circle of light, the general asked precipitately: "The fourth battery?"

"Are holding their ground."

"What are they doing?"

was running through the fortified area in search of the commander of the division, to whom he was to communicate the general's orders, some officer pulled him by the coat-tail and, pointing to the Prince, said: "Couldn't you take this Don Quixote away with you?"

"You can take him away just as well as I."

"He is hanging round and giving orders like an overseer. Someone may make a mistake and shoot his head off."

"Where could I take him?"

"Lock him up in the chapel of St. Hyacinthe's."

"Lock him up yourself!"

The most heavily attacked point was the salient of the work. The Austrians gained the top of it in a mass, knocked off the empty barrels, and pulled out the palings. The handful of Polish soldiers fought them with all its might, but was unable to hold out against the heavy onslaught. The officers knew that they could not hold their ground without assistance.

In the mean while the general's adjutant brought them the information that they would receive no help. Prince Gintult leaped into the lost breach and, shouting and urging, goaded the soldiers to resistance. Thus, pushing them to action with his fists and actually commanding, he barred the contested passage. Seeing that the worn soldiers were no longer able to hold their ground, he snatched a carbine from the ground and leaped into the fatal angle with a group of fifteen or sixteen *voltigeurs*. At first the assailants drew back before their wolfish leaps, but the uncertainty lasted only a moment. Gintult slipped on the yielding clay and fell on his face into the ditch behind the parapet. Ten or more men fell instantly upon him in order to seize him alive. But he would not let them. He lifted himself to his knees in the muddy ditch and began to tussle with the drunken soldiery with his bare

hands. He cried for help, seeing that the group of soldiers who had run to his aid was defending itself at the foot of the parapet. But the others, too, were soon overcome by the throng. A desperate fury swept over him now. He gave the nearest ruffian a smashing blow between the eyes, he hit another on the breast. He made a violent lurch to tear himself free. He did not succeed. He fell once more into the muddy ditch, flat on his back, feeling that his strength was leaving him. He spat into the eyes of the nearest foe, who was now lying on top of him, pinning him down. He rattled into his face: "Hurry and do your murdering, you lout!"

But, lo, the soldier covers his mouth with his hand. He is whispering something to him, telling him something secretly. He stutters, stutters. . . . The Prince opens his eyes. He cannot catch his breath. . . .

"Hush—hush—your Worship," the Austrian soldier whispers. "Don't dare move!"

Gintult closed his eyes. His burdened chest was breaking. His thought flew at a lightning pace seeking the place, the time, the circumstances, when he had seen that face, heard that voice. At length it found them. . . .

"None other—Peter Olbromski's second—ha ha!"

All about him the clash of carbines, tumult, stamping of feet. . . . The enemy is trampling over them as they lie in the ditch, he pours into the captured hole. The ground-work is full of cries, of uproar, of sounds of shots, of clatter of empty barrels, of stones, of falling rubble.

"Who are you?" the Prince groaned out.

"Hush!"

Minutes passed, as long as centuries. Presently, hearing that the main bulk of the army had made its way into the interior of the fortification, Micik lifted himself from the ground, looked about him, and with one powerful tug pulled

the Prince out of the ditch. With swift step, unmolested by the soldiers who were rushing upon the field-work, they ran, bounded through the western fosse until they reached the end of the cloister walls. There they were caught by Gintult's peasants, who lay in wait in the transverse ditch. They were soon among them. The Prince let himself be known and, together with Micik, descended at once to the bottom of the gorge. The gorge was fast filling with a throng of soldiers and peasants forced from the confines of St. Jacob's by the victorious Austrian column. They tried in vain to reach the church. The whirling, shattered, driven multitude pushed them back into the depths of the chasm.

From there they heard what went on. The commanding officer was now running through the centre of the mob with unsheathed sword, forming the men into a column to be led to the fourth battery, located at St. Paul's. The younger officers, in accordance with the order, were evacuating the buildings of St. Jacob's Convent. The Prince accosted one of these without delay and asked him in a sharp and challenging manner why, instead of driving his men to the defence of the old church, he was leading them out of it with such signal valour? The officer gave him a high look and, to be rid of him, muttered: "These buildings will be razed to the ground within the next hour. How can I leave my men in them!"

"Why should these buildings be razed to the ground?"

"They will be demolished with the cannons in our batteries. The Austrians have taken the convent, but they will perish in it."

Without listening further, the Prince started hurriedly uphill. Micik hastened after him. Running thus, up the clayey steps, Gintult had a momentary sensation that he had already done just such a thing at some time in the past, that an inevitable fatality was awaiting him at the top of that hill. He

The outcry struck Raphael Olbromski like a clap of thunder. A dreadful terror raised the hair on his head. He saw in his soul the power of the oath taken upon that cry, and felt the noose of its spell upon his body. Without breath, his eyes

white with film, he drew his sword from his scabbard and leaped up to the Prince. The latter looked at him with half-dead eyes and commanded: "Snatch the matches from them and put them out! Do not let the sacred ashes be destroyed!"

Raphael fell upon the cannoneer and snatched the linstock from his hand. He fell upon the second and snatched the match from his hand. He jumped up to the third, but in the next instant fell to the ground, brought down by blows of swords and fists.

When, some time later, he came to himself, he saw that he was lying beneath a wall, in a narrow street which led to the Sandomierz market-place. The Prince lay bleeding beside him. Several soldiers ran by. He heard a sudden clatter of carbine-shots, the crackling of a distant fire. . . . Someone slipped his hands under Raphael's head, lifted him from the ground, and seated him on a boulder. The face of one of his comrades bent over him. The man was whispering hurriedly: "Get away! Hide somewhere as fast as you can! You will be shot in a few moments if you don't get away. They are looking for you already—run!"

Raphael understood this advice. He passed his eyes over the ground. Prince Gintult . . . An Austrian soldier bending over him and rinsing his face with water. What did this mean? The next moment the soldier was taking the Prince by the shoulders, lifting him to his back, pulling at Raphael's sleeve. They started together, they ran. . . . Fire before them. . . . The colossal embers gave birth to white smoke and flying ash. . . . They went as in a dream, amid houses burned to their groundsels, amid stacks of smouldering fire-brands. Cannon smote the city from the Pepper Hills, fire-balls fell without ceasing from across the Vistula, missiles thrown from the Sandomierian plains whistled over the city. Not a living being in sight. . . . Raphael and, be-

hind him, the soldier carrying the Prince ran on in leaps, looked round, studied the place. They turned into a space like a paved courtyard, or a church graveyard, which, after the burning of the adjacent buildings, could not be recognized. They came blindly to a rounded mound or charnel-house in the back of a deep yard. They pushed the door, closed with a rusty knob, and descended a half-ruined stairway to a deep, dark cavern. Crowding there, they saw a mass of people. Women crouching over cradles greeted them with cries of terror; children hid in corners. Micik motioned to them to keep silent. As he looked round in the darkness, he saw the continuation of the underground passage. They went there. Their way was barred by heaps of stone which had fallen from the vaulted ceilings. They proceeded stealthily through airless passages, through wide caverns, through archways and narrow corridors, in thick darkness. Until, lo, at a certain point, a light greeted them! Cold, fresher air. . . . Overhead, in the ceiling, they saw a small, barred window. The tired soldier laid the Prince on the ground. He unstrapped his rolled-up coat and threw it on the wet, clay floor; he ungirt his sword. He laid Gintult on the coat, Raphael next to him. He seated himself in a corner.

The Prince was slowly coming to. He wheezed heavily and coughed; his breath came in impotent rasps. Olbromski looked about him. At first he saw only the grey, as if hoary thickness of the gloom. From the opening of the window fell a solid shaft of half-light which dispersed and vanished in the depths of the cavern. But as his eyes grew accustomed to the dark, he distinguished something like a grey hummock, like a sloping mound. . . .

He rose from his place and drew nearer. The farther end of the deep cavern was filled with heaps of human bones. The flimsy light revealed the brows of the skulls and the

cheek-bones. It passed in half-light threads over the painfully smiling lips; it showed the shrunken fingers and the martially outstretched arm-bones. A tremor passed over the visitor, for it seemed to him that the mound of bones was silently laughing at him.

45. The Corner Room

IN the night of the 30th of June, after the complete evacuation of Sandomierz by the Austrians, who had taken it by virtue of the capitulation of the 19th of June, Raphael Olbromski, Prince Gintult, and the soldier Micik quietly slipped out of the city. It was just about to be taken by the Cossacks who were coming in boats across the Vistula. Micik, dressed in the uniform of one of the Polish uhlans, procured an apology for a horse somewhere in the city for himself and a better one for Raphael. The uhlan's cloak, tied between the horses' saddles, served as a bed for the Prince, who was seriously ill.

They rode out at day-break through the Cracow gate. There was enough light to allow Raphael to see what had happened to the city. Not a trace of the palisades; everything levelled and burned to the ground; the fosses and trenches, cut with such toil, filled up, the parapets demolished. For a few moments he felt an onset of anger, the most human anger, at the sight of the products of such great labor destroyed so utterly. But he crushed it in him with the mallet of a powerful thought: "Now to Tarniny!"

They rode downhill at a lively trot. In the masterless, defenceless, and ruined city no one asked them that night for the password. The morning dawn, spreading over the valley of the Vistula, revealed charred ruins, cannon-furrowed fields, trampled grain. They made off toward Samborze at top speed in order to enter the fields and ravines before broad daylight. The sun was rising when, beyond Goryczany, they turned to the right into a small ravine and entered its maze of tortuous and narrow paths. Far off, on a distant rise, lay Tarniny.

They could find no place to put the sick man in Sandomierz.

Noise and confusion broke out in the house. Women's figures began to emerge, the servants came out. Here is the mother . . . an old, old woman, bent and withered, scarcely recognizable . . . her face all in wrinkles and folds, her faded eyes scarce able to see. Sophie! A huge woman, but half dressed, some eight months with child.

They had barely recovered from their emotion at seeing Raphael when they heard with amazement that they were to extend hospitality to the wounded Prince Gintult. Tumult broke out in the entire house; there was running, bringing of linen to the corner room, once Raphael's, calling of servants, and an indescribable general fracas. Micik was left alone in the yard, beside the horses. Dressed in the uniform of an uhlan killed on the Sandomierz battle-field, he looked like one of the old guard. His eyes ran anxiously over the country-side, the fields, the gorges. The Prince was carried into the little room and laid in the fresh, thickly pillowed bed. The open window filled the room with the fragrance of roses. The Prince lay with lowered lids, half unconscious, gazing into one corner. His forehead was wrinkled unchangeably, uniformly, as though he were pondering without cease over the same vexing thought. A long unshaved, greying beard had covered his lips, his cheeks, and his chin, and changed him into an old man.

All left the room in the hope that the sick man would sleep. They seemed to wish to think up the best sort of food for so distinguished a guest, the most health-giving, they wished to learn of everything at once, but in reality they wished to look unhindered at Raphael. The aged couple surrounded their son from both sides, took him to the light of the window. They wiped their eyes dry to see him better, they turned their deafened ears to lose nothing of his words. They shuffled their feet, they peered. . . .

while, opened the stable door with trembling hands and, with a gesture as though he were tearing out his entrails, cried: "The bay gelding for the young gentleman! The grey mare for you! Quick! Don't stand! You saved my son Peter. . . . Change the saddle! Hurry! They're in sight!"

Micik bridled the splendid horses, reared under the master's eye, in darkness, nourished on bread and oats, and led the nags on which they had come into the stable. Raphael fastened the surcingles. A moment later they were in the saddle.

They pressed their spurs to the sides of their mounts.

"Micik!" the old man added in a shout, "may the Lord repay you. . . . Protect my boy!"

They heard the old man sobbing behind them, they saw his arms stretched from the portico.

They rushed out of the yard in giant leaps into the little glen beside the cemetery, thence into the plain and into the wide, green meadows. Their horses fly! They speed like the morning breeze on the wings of their wing-footed steeds, pursued by the distant cry of the Austrians. If they could only reach the woods, reach the woods!



46. Beneath Bald Mountain

AFTER the loss of his place at the side of General Sokolnicki as a result of the events attendant upon the siege of Sandomierz, Raphael returned to his regiment and took his former place. Thanks only to the swiftness of events, of the capitulation and the marching out of the Sandomierz garrison, he managed to come out of the entire affair unobserved and without court martial, degradation, or worse consequences.

On the 4th of July, when all the Polish forces started southward from Radom in the wake of the retreating enemy, Olbromski rode at the head of some half a hundred uhlans from his squadron in the van of the advance guard of the cavalry. They were proceeding to the Holy Cross mountains. He swiftly passed a village, through which a considerable force of Austrians had only just passed, and cautiously entered the woods.

A fine summer drizzle was falling. The cool meadows and forest glades had not been mowed as yet. Only here and there came the smell of withering hay. Blue-grey layers of thin rain-clouds wandered low over the woods, over the mountain chain, over the brigand-harbours wilderness. The Bald Mountain spread its dark-blue, beech-studded cloak before the division of soldiers. Here and there trailing pillars of clouds rose into the sky like living breath flying skyward from the holy beech-trees. Nearer, between the crowns of primeval firs, moved wet, heavy clouds, now revealing the titanic columns of the trees, now covering them with a lofty vault of sombre black. The nearer they came to the mountain, the headier and sweeter grew the smell of the wild. Their eyes beheld its inmost depths, its strange glebe, full of washed-out pebbles overgrown with rust, with smut, with greenish mildew,

its sloping, hilly ground, mastered by giant roots. All around rose fir stumps covered with the colour of dulled silver. To northward all were hung with pelts of hard, dry moss, of the colour of jasper, with rough and shaggy beards, with matted hair.

The tiny division passed the forester's hut and a village built in the heart of the wilderness and inhabited by men as hale as the pines and as stout as the beech-trees. The ground grew harder as they ascended, filled more and more with a frangible, blood-red stone.

The tall square pillar of the convent tower and its white walls now emerged from the gloom of the fir-trees. Just beyond the farriery and the convent inn was the high fence of the garden. Olbromski drew his division behind the brick pile of the inn and the smithy and divided it into two parties. The one he told to continue down the road as far as the little church, while he himself, with the other, was to examine the convent courtyards to see if perchance they did not hold lurking Austrians. He dismounted and told ten of the riders to do likewise. The eleventh remained with the horses behind the inn. At a signal given by the trumpeter he was to flee with the horses to the left, into the forest, as far as an indicated glade.

Raphael and his group leaped over the tall, roofed fence just behind the inn and found themselves in the garden. Once here, Raphael lost his desire to patrol, examine, search. He stopped in an arbour of wild trees at the end of the garden and for a few moments gave free rein to his soul. He saw, as it were, his childhood, he dreamed a visible, waking dream of himself. He had been in this garden as a little child and remembered it all, remembered perfectly. . . .

Between the trees, in the outlets of the avenues of fruit-trees, glistened white walls. That which had once so im-

pressed his childish imagination now impressed him with equal force. . . .

The convent! With wonder, amazement, and the old awe he now looked at this embodied childhood memory. The same straddling, grey scarps, expressive of tremendous effort, of strength, of whole-souled, peasant strain. The same stones which either had weathered to a black or rusty colour or, calcifying, had covered themselves with a white, indestructible glaze and turned into everlasting tiles. Above the scarps were high, cold walls, with small windows beneath the roof. A wicked thought kindled a smile when involuntarily one thought of the purpose which ordered the windows of the nuns to be built so high. The wicked thought winged by and, shaming itself, slipped furtively into the thick groves of fruit-trees, into the flower-beds, where tall, slender lilies with fringed bursts of petals, with brown stamens and sticky, yellowish sap, gave forth an odour of cleanliness. Moist blotches clung to the corners of the buildings and, like ever-present shadows, lay in wait for the whiteness of the limestone walls, as derision lies in wait for ecstatic rapture, as ribald sarcasm lies in wait for the virginity of emotion. . . .

The soldiers ran swiftly across the garden and entered the spacious courtyard. The convent stables and yards were empty, but along the fence were traces where horses had been fed. Camp-fires still smouldered in the middle of the yard. They caught a farm-hand in one of the stables and quickly learned that in the night, almost at day-break, German forces, both horse and foot, had stopped at the convent, that the officers ate in the refectory, and that all of them then went on toward Kielce, only they did some powerful firing somewhere on the way.

Having examined everything thoroughly, Raphael went to meet the other half of his forces, which was to wait in

front of the church. He walked through a little orchard between the field wall and the side of the church. Pear-trees grew there, shielded from the wind and basking in the warmth of the quiet nook. A white birch swung the long plaits of its branches against the iron bars of the tiny church-window.

At the entrance was a font, roughly hewn from a block of quartzite. Deep in the church, beneath the pulpit, was the monument of a knight asleep in his armour, carved centuries ago in beautiful Italian marble and now honestly and industriously coated with whitewash and year in and year out solicitously recoated for every worthy feast.

In the place of the ornate inscription under the recumbent figure of the knight, the lime showed the depressions of the letters, which refused to be coated by any means: *Sic transit gloria mundi* . . .

The soldiers knelt down in the aisle; the officer took a seat in a stall and sank in dreams, in memories. He raised his eyes—and a tremor shook him. In the wide Venetian window which looked out on the church from the mystic convent corridors, he saw three shadows—heads framed in the squares of their monastic veils, in white, folded cornets, covered with dark broadcloth . . . hands folded on the breast; eyes motionless . . . painful, old, yellow faces, as if of spectres from the beyond. . . .

He rose from his place and quickly left the church. He took delight in the ringing of his sword and spurs, in the luxury of his military dress in contrast with the greyness and poverty of the convent. Swiftly he ran down the wide steps between the white rocks of the foundation of the tower. He gave the command “to horse” and jumped into his saddle.

“Now,” he dreamed, “to Vyrvy. A short visit with Uncle Nardzevski and then on, to the south. . . .”

Speeding on in front, he repeated one single word, like a slogan: "Yaz! Yaz!"

They bounded out of the Bald Mountain forest into the highway, upon the first foot-hill. But scarcely had Raphael glanced into the valley when he reined his horse and stopped as if turned to stone. Black pillars of smoke rose from Vyrvy and towered into the sky! Not a sign of the house, the house was gone, the barns were gone. . . . Only red, smouldering ruins crept here and there between the black tops of the trees. The division took off across pasture and meadows, over fences and ravines, as fast as the horses could breathe. They came like a wind-storm to the village, the gate, the yard. Emptiness everywhere. Not one human being. Of the house remained only a heap of embers, of charred groundsels, of hard larch fire-brands, a few black ruins of chimneys. Of the whole domain only the stone storehouse.

The uhlans rushed inside. They gave a frightful cry. Raphael bounded after them. He reeled back like a drunken man. He saw Nardzevski in a pool of blood, hacked with swords so horribly that his body preserved only the merest trace of human form. His face was hacked, his arms, breast, and hands gashed with cuts. But all around, in the empty holds, on the thick beams of the floor, before the door-step and beyond it, were black streams of blood. The old squire did not give up his life without pay. Raphael sobbed as he stood beside him. He told the soldiers to lift him and carry him outside. The corpse had already cooled. The hand still held the remarkably damascened pistol. The soldiers made a thorough search of the storehouse. One of them noticed a ladder drawn up to a rafter joint under the roof. They saw a man sitting in the smoke vent. He was pulled down and brought before the officer. It was Casper, Nardzevski's old huntsman. For

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a long time he looked at the soldiers and the officer with sullen suspicion. He preserved an obstinate silence.

"What happened here?" Olbromski shouted at him.

"They killed the master."

"Who did?"

"The soldiers."

"What soldiers?"

"The Germans."

"When?"

"This morning."

"Cavalry or foot?"

"There was cavalry, there was foot."

"How did it happen?"

"They told his Worship to open the granary, the barns too, to give them the keys to the larder! I knew at once that things were bad. The master beckoned to me with his finger and told me through his teeth to run to the village and tell all that breathe to come to his aid with flails, with pitchforks, with axes. I make for the door, but before I could turn, the master cursed out these officers, called them down, and told them to get away from the manor!"

"Did they go?"

"Where, now?—go! When I came back across the orchard from the bailiff's, they were already going for him with their swords. His Worship had by that time fallen into his worst anger. He leaped into the small room and locked the door behind him. Then he grabbed his pistols and his fowling-piece and got out through the orchard into the storehouse. He told me to take the bags of powder there too. And these officers after us! We slammed the door. . . . The master says to me: 'Climb up into the vent-hole and fire from above!' I went up and laid out a good number. Meantime they broke

the door. The poor lamb had no place to back against. . . .”

“Couldn’t you help him, you scoundrel?”

“I helped all there was room for. . . .”

“And the village?”

“The men came out of the huts, some were even running post-haste, but when they aimed at them in a row, they hid, dogs that they are, behind the fence and then took to their heels. I looked out through the hole in the roof—smoke! The barns were on fire, the house was in smoke! Only this storehouse they couldn’t set fire to! When the master had given up the ghost, they dragged out the bodies of their comrades, buried them in the ground, and went off.”

“Where are they buried?”

“Behind the storehouse, all of them.”

Raphael walked mindlessly in that direction. He saw before him a tall, curved mound of freshly piled earth.

## 47. In the Ruins

THE task before the party of uhlans marching in the second half of December 1809 on Calatayud and Saragossa was the destruction of the guerrilla bands in Aragon. Partisan Porliera, surnamed Marquesito, had cut all the Pyrenean roads and passes, impeded the communication of the French armies, intercepted the post, and prevented the delivery of supplies. Young Cedro, who belonged to this expedition, proceeded to old Salduba with keen interest. He thought fondly of the regions to the north of Burviedro, as fondly as though they were his native parts. He had spent very happy days in those ravines. And now, in the rain, wind, and frightful weather, he marched merrily, as of yore. Their immediate goal now was Saragossa. He looked for it from the angles of the road, he peered into the mist.

Finally old Gaykos muttered from the second file: "You can see it already, that vixen of a town."

"Indeed? But why, old fellow, are you abusing it so?"

"Because it is a vixen, sir. How many of our people perished there in the first siege! How many yellow collars are now rotting in that ground!"

"Yes, but the Spaniards, too, lost a good many."

"What are the Spanish to me! There's plenty of them. And of us there is only a handful. If one goes, there is a hole left forever. What have you to fill it up with? If a crowd of them perishes, a new crowd springs up in its place in a trice."

From Xalon they hastened eastward over the Pampeluna road, wishing to see what had taken place. On the upper slope of the Ebro, amid the olive-trees, in the once abandoned houses, one could already see the inhabitants. Beyond the mon-



astery a wide view opened before them, for the trees had been cut down in almost the entire valley. Only the stumps protruded from the ground. Leaves appeared only on the foot-hills of both slopes. Even before they reached the old castle of the Inquisition, they encountered the earthworks which cut across the road leading to the Church of the Capuchins. These huge works were already empty and deserted. Only here and there a French sentry wandered about them.

They began to ascend, and, flying over fields and across ditches, they reached the Huerba. A bridge had been thrown across it at one point, and thus they reached the road which led to Belchite and the Engracia gate. Amazed and frightened, the division stopped without command. The road, like all the others, like the road from Monte Torrero to Saint Joseph and the Valencia highway, was thrice cut by parallels which stretched uninterruptedly to the very edge of the Ebro. Standing on a rise, they looked down on the enormous French siege-works. At every point, wherever it fell, the eye encountered covered ways, traces of mounds, caponiers, posterns. Stretching still farther was the line of the second parallel, much less irregular, terminating in a battery from which six cannon had at one time fired upon the bridge and the riverside suburbs. A similar figure of tortuous ditches and broken ramparts was formed by the earthworks to the east of the suburbs on the other side of the Ebro. All this now lay empty and abandoned, soaking in the autumn rain. The ground was still yellow, its entrails turned out and laid bare. The once proud convents had a stooping, sunken air. Of St. Joseph there remained only the towers and the riddled walls.

The uhlans proceeded in silence along the crest of the rise to the river. Only at that point they entered the city. The sight which greeted them when, admitted by the French sentries, they came to the De Sol gate exceeded everything that they

could have imagined—the ground ribbed by the Spanish defensive fortifications, the brick facings of the buildings peeled off by shells, the houses burned, empty rooms revealed by fallen front walls, ceilings suspended over the gaping rooms, roofs caved in. . . .

The uhlans rode in formidable array, with their caps on their ears, with frowning brows. The street of Sant' Engracia—had vanished. On its site rose fantastic mountains, something like a view of the Bernese Alps from the top of the Rhone glacier. The Franciscan monastery, shattered with mines throughout its grounds, to the outmost edge of its gardens, as far as the St. Thomas Convent at one end and the Church of San Diego at the other, lay torn from its joints, pushed off its groundsels, crushed into shives and splinters. The hospital for the insane, the convent of the Virgins of Jerusalem and all the houses of the district as far as the little street of Recogidas formed an endless ruined area. Here and there still stood a solitary wall from which jutted a beam or hung a window, a fragment of a door. . . . Here and there rose inexpressibly sullen groupings of houses whose corners had been destroyed by mines. It would have been difficult to guess what purpose their vaults and angles had been designed to serve. They now stood before the eyes like rotting corpses. The entire ravaged plain exhaled an odour of cadavers which no one had buried. Decomposed in the hot summer weather, they now greeted and saluted the victors from the ruins.

Cedro turned in his saddle, placed his hand on the cantle, and looked at the ravaged city. No thought entered his mind. Not a single remembrance wandered in his memory. A physical rapture held him as if in an iron yoke. He dragged himself from place to place with stupefied eyes, affirming his conviction that, after all, they had done the thing with might and grandeur. They had uprooted a pile like the Franciscan con-

vent! They had pulverized the stones which had been laid centuries ago! They had shattered what had outlived all the emirs of the Moors, all the *justizas* and kings of Castile! They had crushed the pride of the Aragonese. The charm of the night of destruction, the beauty of ruthless tyranny, rose like a wind from this wild desert and enveloped him. A martial pride lifted his breast at the sight of the shattered buildings.

"You have been humbled, Saragossa," he thought inwardly. "You rise no longer with your ancient cry of freedom—*Avi fuerza!*—with the slogan of your ancient and countless rebellions. Invincible, *siempre eroica*, you, too, have stooped. At last you lie in ruins, with your throat in a noose!"

Sent for orders, the *maréchal des logis* returned with instructions that they take quarters in the abolished convent of St. Thomas. The division proceeded there without delay and put up in lordly style in the spacious refectories and numerous cells. The excellent stables furnished room for all the horses. The officers and soldiers retired early, for the first time in so long, in complete safety and peace.

After dark, Cedro loaded his pistols, fastened his sword high at his waist, and set out alone into the city. A heavy rain was beating down, a high wind whistled and howled through the streets. The gates were closed, the hallways empty. Only occasionally a huddled figure would slip by, wrapped to the ears and eyes in a clinging storm-coat. The white cloak which Christopher had casually thrown over his shoulders attracted the attention of these infrequent passers-by. This one or that stopped in his course and followed the white figure with his eyes. A throaty word, like the scrape of the edge of a poniard which refuses to be pulled from the scabbard for the rust of blood which covers it, followed him across the dark: "*Carajo!*"

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The uhlan paid no heed to these voices and did not deign to turn his head to see who it was that barked at him in the darkness.

He walked on, wrapped in his cloak, lost in thought. In a dream he sees Olshyna and Stoklosy, his home, his father, Mary, and Trepka. He has brought them a guest from the far south. He sees Mary and the strange *doncella* talking on a summer's day in the shade of the great birch-trees whose long avenues border the fields of grain, the life-giving meadows. Will she like his northern country? Will she greet with a friendly heart the poor valley of the Visloka? "Will you take it to your heart, child of Aragon? Will you understand the whisper of the rye-fields, the rustle of the yellowing hides of oats, the voice of the forest by the dike, and the soft splash of the water?" Will she understand the language of the drowsy, misty plain? She will bring into the midst of his people fire and invincible pride, she will unite her flaming and lofty soul with the Slavic quiet and tranquillity. She will be the fire, she the ardour, under Olshyna's roof! He sees the moment of greeting, he has delightful quarrels with Trepka over this new guest in Stoklosy. "Ha ha! You have predicted well, old politician. . . . I shall bring you a surprise from distant lands." Hunts with horses and hounds. . . . He saw himself, in his mind's eye, flying at her side over the autumn fields, he heard the wind running a race with the winged steeds. Oh, clear unfathomed eyes! Oh, radiant roses of that night!

He walked on, beset by dreams, only half conscious of the fact that he was making for the place which he had stormed a year and a half ago. He turned toward the little streets running at right angles in the direction of the Franciscan Convent. He passed one of them, a second, then entered a third. There was no light anywhere, not a trace of human life. On the day of the battle Christopher had so well learned the

distance from the corner of this street to the dark entrance of the house that he now found it unconsciously. He had to stretch out his arms, wishing to touch the walls of the opposite side of the street. He began to walk in that direction, but he soon stumbled and fell, with his breast, then his knees, and finally his brow, against a heap of rubble. Rough, shapeless clods and fragments of walls, piles of brick, surrounded him on all sides. His hands touched ruins slippery with rain and wet gravel. His feet turned in the sharp teeth of the stones as though caught in irons, his knees knocked against projecting bluffs. He climbed higher and higher upon the ruined mound, upon the piled wreckage. He walked straight ahead at first, then to the right, and, grappling with the falling rubble, made another score of steps. He sank into pits, crawled over fallen walls, slid into crevices, fell on his face into deep caverns, until he had traversed that entire region and reached the Cosso. Then, exhausted in body and spirit, he sank upon a heap of stones, telling himself that there was nothing here. A complete indifference, his old apathy, came upon him. He felt only a spiritual and bodily fatigue, lassitude, and revulsion. At intervals a laugh of disillusion broke out within him, a laughter intolerable, damned. "Who knows?" he thought indifferently, lying motionless on the drifts of plaster, "perhaps she is rotting somewhere beneath this rubble. Perhaps if one dug in the sand with one's fingers, one would come upon her corpse. The rain seeps through the shattered bricks, into the mouldy sandstone. The dirty water drips into her eyes, her eyes wide open with terror." Absorbed in himself, he did not feel the lashing rain, he did not hear the whining of the winds. But suddenly a peculiar sound fell upon his ear. He woke as if from a hard sleep. He felt a tremor in the ground on which he was lying, a shudder in its ruins and wreckage. Lazily he raised his head. Somewhere near, behind a wall just at his

side, sounded a dull pounding, as if of iron bars and picks. Christopher listened to it for some time, then forgot that it sounded. He decided that these were wretches searching the ruins for bodies to rob—and rested at that. He lay as before.

In the meanwhile the heavy footsteps, the ring of the bars, and the whispers began to near him. Anger now raised him from the ground. Several dark figures loomed vaguely in the thick gloom of the night. Christopher pulled out a pistol, cocked it, and waited motionless.

The prowlers walked slowly, scraping over the stones with their hobnailed soles. From the scope of the clatter Christopher inferred that there were at least five men within the ruins. Three walked in a group. They must have noticed his cloak, for they stopped. Silence ensued. Only the wind squeaked as it slid over the rugged crags. Suddenly a swift flash of a dark lantern fell on the figure of Cedro like a zigzag of lightning. Thereupon he raised his pistol and said calmly in French: "Who goes there?"

Silence.

After a moment a second hurried flash of the lantern ran over the ground behind Christopher, to his left and right, like a hunting-dog searching to discover if he had supporters. At the same time the dark figures dispersed and diffused in the darkness in such a way that they surrounded the white form of the uhlan on all sides. He aimed at the first black shadow which his eyes encountered. He verified his direction several times and pulled the trigger. The echo of the shot fell into the shattered ruins like the discharge of a gun. Cedro pulled a second pistol from his belt. With his left hand he grasped his sword. He heard the leaps of his assailants on the groaning stones. An iron cudgel found and touched him. Then, turning about, Cedro fired suddenly, having placed the muzzle almost on the breast of the man who had sought to seize him. The

man fell to the ground with a mortal groan. Christopher leaped over him, swinging his sword, which he had transferred to his right hand, to right and left, before and behind him. His legs twisted out of joint and slipped on the stones. He fell on his knees, on his hands, he rose frantically and bounded away from his antagonists. They followed him closely. The ruins over which he was fleeing had no end. They formed a frightful maze of by-ways, walls, rooms, pits. In one of these Cedro stopped. He perceived by the changed voice of the wind that he was in the ruins of some building. His back against the remnant of a chimney, he waited for his assailants.

Two of them came to this place and flashed their dark lantern straight into his eyes. For one twinkling of an eye he saw their horrible faces. He leaped at the two and swung his sword blindly, with all his strength, feeling that the dread hour had come. His arm whirled in lightning blows, in forward and side thrusts. The others struck at him from above, in order to cleave his head at one stroke. One of them gave a hideous cry and ceased fighting, but the other continued to deal gigantic blows. Christopher felt his rasping breath and the odour of his body. Guided by his hearing, he bounded upon him with a tigerish leap, wishing to pierce his breast. Both tumbled to the ground. Their hands at each other's throat, wrestling in mortal combat, they rolled and writhed over the stones. Now Christopher was on top, now the other. Their heads crashed against the rocks, their teeth sank into their clothing, tearing it by morsels; their hands groped for their throats like iron fangs. The Spaniard was a thick-set man and of iron strength, so that Cedro could not hold his own against him. He was aided by his agility and youth. He tore himself loose, slipped out of the cruel embrace, threw himself anew at the adversary's throat with movements swifter

than thought. He defended himself without pausing, attacking furiously. He realized, however, that his struggle was vain. A drench of mortal sweat came out on his skin.

Despair rent his brain. For a moment he debated—to tear himself free and run with all his might! He jerked violently, arched his back, and wrenched himself from his opponent's hold. But the other had become aware of his weakness. Both were now kneeling on the ground, face to face, waiting for the death of the weaker. The Spaniard drew a long breath and, before Cedro could move, fell upon him with his entire weight. He seized his throat with greedy hands. At that moment, writhing in convulsions, the two dropped into a narrow pit. They rolled down a steep stairway, throttling and biting each other. At the bottom, where the horrible stench of corpses stood like a moveless thing, Christopher tore himself from the hands of the thug. With a reflex movement, with the strength of a fresh-drawn breath, he sprang upon the stairway and in two, three leaps reached the open air. In the same instant he bent down and grasped a huge clod of earth which his foot had touched and his knee found mobile. He raised it in both hands high above his head with a strength not his own, but as if of six men, and with a titter of joy threw it unerringly, in a single heave, into the opening of the stairway. He heard a sigh, a death, a groan, an end, a broken sob. Then a second clod into the same place, a third, a fourth! He searched the ground for larger and larger hulks, weights beyond the strength of man, and cast them into the black pit with frenzied haste, with wild, inhuman power. He now saw this opening with his eyes as if in bright day. He had no conception of where he was or what he was doing. He clawed the sodden lumps of shattered masonry with his naked hands and continued to throw them into the hole; he pushed the powdered detritus with his knees and feet.



48. The Post

IN the course of the winter Captain Fialkovski's company made frequent excursions from Saragossa. As a rule, the captain stayed in the city with a part of the division, and the expedition was made by a small party under the command of a lieutenant or a second-lieutenant. At times the company would be divided into several detachments, headed by the four sergeants, the senior sergeant, the eight corporals, and even the two trumpeters. In this manner they watched the roads which led from the mountains to Saragossa.

Some of these small parties ranged the Pampeluna highway and the lowlands adjacent to it, others the valley of the river Gallego; still others went south-eastward over the Valencia road, toward the blue-grey sea, by way of Fuentes de Ebro, across the Royal Canal by way of La Puebla de Híjar, of San Per, to Alcaniz and thence all the way to Monroyo. They returned from these expeditions wounded, shot by guerrillas, lame from the saddle, exhausted from the wind and rain. Christopher Cedro did not take part in these activities for quite a long time by reason of the bad state of his health. His bones were sore, his lungs and liver as if bruised with clubs.

Toward spring, in the first days of March, when in the ruins grass began to push and the joyous shrub of the wistaria, which sucks the colour of the southern sky into its buds and flowers, began to cover the sharp edges of the walls and to throw its arms over their pinnacles, when from the ground full of dead crushed in cellars and extinguished by the plague sprang the lush shoots of the cercis, the love-tree, when unheard-of clumps of violets, of myriad-tinted hyacinths, tulips, and lilies burst into luxuriant growth, Christopher

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wakened, asked for an assignment to duty, and left for the mountains at the head of a scouting party. He had under him His Worth, Sergeant Gaykos and twenty men. He was assigned a wholly new direction. They were to make their way to the mountain passes leading into France, below Val d'Aran in the central Pyrenees. These passes were held by the insurgents. The task was to track them out, find out their strength, and, if possible, free the roads.

They proceeded at first by forced marches, straight north to Monzon, then to Barbastro. On the third day already they found themselves in the pathless mountain reaches about Puente Montagnana above the river Noguera, a northern tributary of the Ebro. The jagged crests of the limestone cliffs disappeared; the drifts of gypsum, the barren ledges and the salt-impregnated rises came to an end. The narrow *barrancos*, fissures so empty that they held not a tree, not a shrub, not a clump of weed, rose upward to the plateau of Sobrarbe, between the upper streams of the Cinca and the Noguera. They entered a region of wind and sweeping clouds. They breathed a cold but moister air.

The ravines which they had passed, those narrow chasms crowded with drifts of weathered rock, were quiet and close. The wind did not reach them, the stagnant air stood as still as the air of a sealed room. In the rocky country which they were crossing now, human habitations were more frequent. In the main, these were shepherds' cottages built of calcareous stone, attached to enclosures for goats and cows. Now and then they encountered the more pretentious dwellings of professional contrabandists, of mountaineers.

Here and there, in places most favourable for gardening, for the raising of vegetables and grain, one could see the ruins of Moorish settlements and houses, so covered with vines and grass since the expulsion of the Moriscos, centuries be-

fore, that it was difficult to distinguish them from the razed dwellings of the bandit hidalgos.

The uhlands encountered no one on their way through these parts. Often they had to lie in wait very long before they captured an inhabitant in his hut and obtained a statement from him. Some of these rare captives were as hard, inaccessible, and unbending in their obstinacy as the Pyrenees themselves; they preferred to die in torture rather than breathe a word of the whereabouts of an insurgent band; they preferred to be burned over a slow fire rather than tell them where the path over which they were marching turned or parted. But there were others, men greedy for gain, or jovial and friendly souls, who would give the desired information for a pinch of good snuff—faulty information for the most part, clumsily invented, unnecessary, or false. They came upon sober politicians, the unerring diviners who always acknowledge the strength of the one who has the most of it. There were base traitors, too. These came of themselves, unbidden, by stealth, in the dark of night; they led the invaders by devious paths and betrayed their securely sleeping countrymen to their death. In the dark of night they took their pay for this and vanished in the mountain chasms.

An unsurpassed inquisitor and an examiner worthy of the name was Gaykos. He posed his questions so skilfully and supported them with such arguments that it appeared at once what sort of man the person questioned was. After two or three "methods" he knew whether it was better to give the gentleman a little fire or to treat him, with Slavic hospitality, to some Spanish wine. Gaykos even had a command, not of Spanish, to be sure, but of a kind of inquisitorial Aragonese. His babble, strange to relate, was comprehensible to prisoners of every cast of character and temperament, like a universally familiar code.

Christopher commanded the excursions himself. They moved for the most part on foot, in a single file, one behind the other, pulling their frightened horses by the bridle over complete wastes, over ledges from which a powdery dust sifted into bottomless abysses. They crept on in the light of the moon and on the darkest nights; they made attacks in the fresh of the morning and at dusk; they fell upon camps and wandering cavalcades.

After long difficulties, lasting almost the entire spring, Christopher succeeded in driving the bands from the mountain passes and trails and in opening a chain of postal stations for the army of General Suchet. At length the little division was freed from these infernal places and received orders to restore the communication, likewise cut off by the guerrillas, with the French garrisons in the south, in the Iberian chains, beyond the Ebro.

Almost directly then from Val d'Aran they went southward, by way of Lerida, through the valley of the river Serge de Mequinenza. Here they took a longish rest with the French army and then started out over the new road which General Suchet was only just building for the purpose of besieging Tortosa. Marching swiftly, they entered the valley of the river Algas and thence, still through the mountains, reached and passed Monroyo. The object of their march was Morella, a small fortress in the mountains where, with two hundred men, Captain Vyganovski was defending himself against the turbulent natives. Christopher had to conquer no end of difficulties before he made his way to the small castle of Morella. The villages, farms, and manors of the vicinity were up in arms and in a state of war. The tiny uhlan detachment had to move like a scorpion in a pile of kindling in order not to be wiped out by the numerous forces. So they marched constantly, almost without sleep. They rushed from

place to place usually at a gallop, in order to strike unexpectedly and without giving the guerrillas opportunity to become aware of their small number.

At last, one day at sundown, after long rides forward and back, they reached the gates of Morella. Real joy it was when they saw themselves in the company of the two hundred foot-soldiers from the banks of the Vistula and under the tender wing of their carbines. Cedro greeted Vyganovski like a blood brother.

The captain was even more withered than in Saragossa. His face had grown black and dry in the marches and winds. The prominent bones of the cheeks and jaw gave it an expression of severity and inexorable rigour. The smile of angelic joy which came to life on his lips at the sight of young Cedro was something exceedingly strange and unexpected on this stern face. In a similarly unaccustomed way his voice rang when he was greeting and mingling with the newcomers. Very soon, however, his demeanour and voice returned to their former stiffness.

Captain Vyganovski occupied a small room in the castle, a corner room with windows which opened out in two directions. It commanded a view of the little city, laid at the foot of the hill, and of the roads leading to it. The captain had a bed, a small table, and two chairs. He had fresh bedding brought to his room and began to entertain the youth. He bustled about in the corners, preparing food, wiping glasses, collecting various utensils. Cedro lay on the cot and looked at him out of the corner of his eyes. Vyganovski said: "Someone was telling me that they had killed you in a battle. Fortunately it was a lie."

"Not exactly a lie. I was three-quarters dead."

"Jest and keep well! You look like an Andalusian horse fattened on corn."



“A bullet passed right through me.”

“A bullet—that’s nothing. That’s as if a fever chill went through you.”

“Thank you for such chills. . . .”

“I’ve had them too.”

“What? Chills?”

“Oh, what is the use of talking! Do you know,” he said suddenly, turning and facing his listener, “I cannot stand this any longer!”

“Stand what?”

“This life.”

“What sentimentality is this?”

“I tell you as soldier to soldier, I swear to you on my unsullied honour, that death would be pleasanter. . . .”

“Why?”

“I am thoroughly sick of life, that is why!”

“But why?”

“I cannot stand this service. I cannot! It has killed me, choked me. I did not enter the army in order to burn Spanish peasants at the stake, to wipe out villages of women and children, to quell cities with fire and sword. I tell you sincerely that in my heart I’m on their side.”

“That’s bad.”

“And so I asked for my discharge two years ago. My petition went and has not returned to this day. The Emperor fights in Austria, sits in Paris, while I wait and wait for my papers. In the mean time I must serve against my own conscience, against my own sword. I fight with myself, I battle with my own mind. A hundred thousand times I have rushed forward blindly to perish and to cease being a base, serving menial! But death will not have me! And I can’t stand this any longer!”

“Do you wish to return home?”



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Vyganovski drew a quick gulp of air. "Do I wish to return home? Yes—home," he whispered with dry lips. "You are a godsend! You do not even know how great a service you could render me."

"I am ready for any."

"Ah well! If it happens that you go in the right direction. What is your route from here?"

"I am to push through to Tortosa, to report about you and the other garrisons on my way. Then I return to Saragossa and the regiment."

"To Tortosa, to Suchet's staff!" Vyganovski cried out with joy.

"What is the problem?"

"Brother, that discharge may be there since God knows when, lying about in some office or other. Our communication with France was broken so long. . . . You told me that the postal stations have been reopened through your efforts. Perhaps it has just come."

"In that case I start tomorrow."

Vyganovski spread his arms and laughed like a child. But a moment later he was again himself. "You are jesting, my brother. How could I let you go without rest!"

"I am going tomorrow. If only my soldiers and I can have a good night's sleep tonight. The horses will have rested. . . ."

He was almost asleep as he was saying this, although he still saw Vyganovski's pale face. He slept like a log until noon of the next day. He was wakened by a fearful July heat, which surged into the room through the open windows. He sat up in his bed fresh and healthy, as strong, indeed, as an Andalusian horse. He thought with delight of the adventures which awaited him on the morrow, on the next day, before he would reach Tortosa.

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Vyganovski came in. Still in the door he said: "That Gaykos of yours! I'd have him toasted before anyone else, the rascal. If it's all true what he is telling my men—"

"What is it?" Cedro asked.

"I went out for the review of the castle and found them already at the bottle. It's a jolly arrangement, for it is not they who are entertaining him, but he them. He has some splendid wines with him."

"Oh yes. . . ."

"He has a mien like a bull designated for the arena in Burgos. I haven't seen a flower like that for a very long time. He sits alone among my footmen, sucking a pipe, now and then taking a great swallow from a cup—a tankard, rather. When he begins to speak, the smoke strains through the sheaves of his moustaches and enfolds his red knob of a nose. And it certainly has bloomed forth on expensive wines—there's no doubt about that."

"He saved my life."

"Where?"

"At Burviedro. I was trampled to death. He caught my horse on the run when I was shot and fell off the saddle. . . ."

"Damn all these battles, these villages and cities!" cried Vyganovski, pacing up and down the room. "Don't I, too, have a pack of cut-throats, robbers, and assassins under me? And yet I spare and esteem them, for they are the ablest. . . . They are the surest to get you out of difficulty in case of assault. What, in the devil's name, are we doing here? How long are you thinking of staying here?"

"Until they tell me to go somewhere else. That's clear, surely. This war must end some time."

"And for whom are you fighting?" the captain blurted out with bloody sarcasm.



“Yes, until orders. This same man, Don José, will take me out. He has passports ready for the two of us from the Spanish generals Villacampa and Barsoncourt for passage to Tortosa. I have confided in him from the bottom of my soul. He understood me like a brother.”

“Very well, if that’s so, give him here quick. I am starting out before night.”

“What, now?” Vyganovski made a pretense of objecting.

“I, too, wish to be worth something in your eyes. I had a good sleep at one time in the convent of the Virgins of Jerusalem under the protection of this sword of yours.”

“Come home with me . . .” Vyganovski accosted him softly.

“Never! Call this man.”

The captain nodded and went out.

Cedro repaired to his men with orders: “Feed the horses well, keep your arms in readiness, and at nightfall march—march!”

They only sighed gloomily and turned to their horses.

Toward evening of that day the Spaniard appeared. He was tall, agile, and strong. He spoke a fairly good French. Cedro entered into conversation with him and studied him attentively with his eyes. Not trusting himself, he took him to Gaykos and told him in Polish who the man was and explained his mission. Gaykos studied him slantwise before he began to speak with him. He reached no bad conclusions, however. He said only that the man must be strong and so he had best be kept among the horses and under watch.

Don José put on the uniform of one of the uhlans, and the latter stayed in his work-clothes. Late in the evening they started out the gate. At parting, Vyganovski besought Christopher to wait for him in Tortosa in case the discharge had come. Cedro promised.

## 49. The Discharge

CEDRO had now been several days in Tortosa, waiting for the arrival of Vyganovski. The discharge, which had lain in the office of General Hlopicki, had been handed to the Spaniard, and he, disguised in peasant clothes, had taken it at once to Morella. Cedro prolonged his stay in the field-works of General Suchet under various pretexts, such as treating the sick horses and repairing saddles. But the day on which he had orders to march out was fast approaching.

On the fifth day of his stay in Tortosa, in the morning, while he was asleep in the field-quarters, he was suddenly awakened with the news that Vyganovski had arrived. He leaped out of bed and began hurriedly to pull on his clothes. But the one who had brought him the news added: "Captain Vyganovski arrived, but someone murdered him near the camp of the second regiment."

Christopher jumped as if stabbed. He turned speechless. He fell on his bed and lay motionless, listening to conversation, surmises, deductions.

After some time, as in a dream, he put on his uniform, fastened his sword, threw on his cloak, and rode to the other side of the Ebro. The hillocks here were hung with thickets of agave. In the distance stood the naked, fissured mountains. The heat of the August day had already come. The sun was baking the yellow sands of the river's edge, consuming with fire the vegetation which was drying at the foot of the hills. On the glistening sand lay the completely naked corpse of Vyganovski.

When Cedro dismounted and ran up to him, he saw two wounds made by a dagger or a knife thrust through the heart by an unerring hand. The assassin had stripped his victim of

his Spanish dress and had thrown it near by, into a clump of bushes. He had done this apparently in such haste that, having pulled the shirt off over the head, he had left the arms straightened upward. These naked arms, helpless and impotent, stretched parallel to each other above the head, seemed to call to Christopher from the ground. Swarms of mosquitoes, flies, and tiny, barely visible, grey-green insects circled noisily just over the body and clung to the dried blood of the wound. The flaming sun had already begun to draw from the corpse the odour of death.

Near the head of the dead man lay a stone. The uhlan seated himself upon it, leaned his elbows on his knees, and looked into the face of his friend. At times his eyes wandered off, now here, now there. Dry sand, powdery and fleet, burned a yard deep, trampled with the heels of feet braced in mortal combat. . . . Here they had fought. Here he attacked him unawares. Here he had dealt him the blow. Here he had dragged him in order to disgrace him before the eyes of the entire army. Here he had torn from him the garments of peace. . . .

"Don José," his lips whispered.

His heart struck like a famished, dreadful hawk. Anger incited his blood. But it was soon quelled by bitter thought. The heart closed and the soul stood once more before the face of the corpse. An indescribable heat was falling upon the body, making it as hot as the sand underfoot. The corpse smelled foully.

Christopher drew his sword from its scabbard and plunged its end in the depths of the wound dealt with the dagger. He sat down upon the stone and talked to the corpse: "Such is our Roncesvalles, my friend. . . ."

After a time he rose from his place and began to dig a grave in the shifting sand. At first with his naked hands,

then with a fragment of a grenade-shell which he had found. He was very hot and very tired when, towards evening, he had scooped out a grave for a man. He laid the body in it. He crossed the outstretched arms on the breast. He covered his comrade with the hot Spanish ground, singing to him and to himself a song of farewell, a lonely song, a song without words.



## 50. Home

FOR a very long time now the will of Squire Nardzevski had been lying in the office of the notary of Kielce. According to the tenor of that act the owner of Vyrvy devised and bequeathed all his real and personal property to his nephew Olbromski.

The wars in Poland ended in the year 1809, and the uhlan, with the miserable grade of lieutenant, was to return from Cracow with his regiment and to go into quarters. It happened, however, that he met his old friend Yarymski and the latter gave him the joyous news. Raphael obtained a discharge from the army as quickly as he could and hastened to Kielce. The official opening of the testament realized all his hopes. He was an independent freeholder. He knew, of course, that of the house and garden there remained only an unploughed piece of land and a few fences, that the peasants, released from socage, would not support the most modest existence. . . . Nevertheless, he hastened there with joy, and, once in the mountains, he stayed.

About that time Sophie's husband removed to Tarniny and avidly took over the management of the estate, ostensibly only temporarily and to relieve the old man. Raphael felt that he could oust the new family from Tarniny only by fiercest struggle. And so he tried to get from home only what he could and felt no undue desire to return there.

At Vyrvy he lived at first on the other side of the pond in a four-family peasant house which had escaped the Austrian ravage. He fitted out a room at the end of this dwelling and spent two winters there in tolerable comfort. He devoted himself entirely to the chase. The huntsman Casper and Micik, whom he had taken from the army to Vyrvy, constituted

his court—Casper as a hunter, Micik as a cook, counsellor, and keeper of the wardrobe. Within a year after settling, Raphael had built barns with stone pillars, tall, and covered with shingle, had restored the stables and folds, and made order in the granary. The next year he raised a new dike with a water-gate on embedded piles and restored the mill, and finally, with the spring of the third year, he began to build himself a house of larchwood and great firs.

Raphael lived every step of this construction in his soul. He himself had examined and chosen every tree during his hunts in the hills. He was present when the peasants pulled them downhill on their backs, when they were being brought and put under the projecting roof. He was present at the splitting of every log, at the dividing of its northern half from the tough southern portion; he saw every blow of the ax; he touched his hand to every knot, every vein and hollow.

In the spring and early summer he spent all his time with the sawyers and carpenters. He grew accustomed to having his feet tangle in the soft, thin ribbons of shavings, to having his ear catch the rustle of the whittlings, the gliding melody of the plane, the ringing of the chisel against the pith of the larch. There was not a sill which he had not examined to the inmost core with calculation, with eye and hand. When walls began to grow out of the giant trunks, he rejoiced like a child. He was building a new life for himself, rearing strong walls on a stone foundation, fastening the frame with strong timber and immovable beams for strength, for might against wind and storm. He carved the name and year himself. At length the roof began to rise from the pile of scattered shingles and laths.

Simultaneously with the building of the house, there went on an intensive clearing of the wastes, tearing up of juniper, and removal of stones. Something of the aims of his brother

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Peter, not so much by the action of the latter's example upon his will and intellect as by the force of an unconscious heredity, attached itself to the young agriculturist. From early spring to late autumn the reaches of the so-called wastes and the slopes of the hills smoked with piles of uprooted juniper burned together with the stumps of the firs. The enfranchised but poverty-stricken labourers cleared the ground of the huge stumps of pines, of firs and beech-trees which had rustled there. Giant clods of earth, hung with masses of quartzite, laced with countless roots, strewed every wider plain. The pits under them were filled and levelled diligently. Young lads and children gathered the unnumbered masses of stone and carried them to the way-side mounds.

The glebe was stony. Round, grey, hard boulders lay not only on the surface, but also beneath the thin layer of fertile soil, on which grew grass, moss, and forest flowers. Their bald pates stared from the ground wherever one looked, wherever one stepped. When the men touched the ground loosened by the uprooted trunks, torn by the pick into pits and humps, the stones seemed to come out in clusters, to peel out like nuts, to come forth and multiply before one's very eyes like swarming insects. The plough, plunged for the first time into the newly-cleared ground, scraped, squealed, writhed, and truly battled. It tore roots, cut half-rotten poles, and sundered the age-old lairs of stones. The first furrows were crooked, here shallow, there reaching too deep, to the rocky bottom beneath the soil, the clods falling to right and left. The soil did not yield her virginity lightly. One had to sunder her coherent wholeness, tear her myriad ligaments, sever her arteries, plough out the stubborn stone, and carry it away with a sorely aching back.

Came the summer of 1812.

After the mowing of the rye, toward the end of July,

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Raphael worked intensively at clearing new soil. Tawny hides of oats still stood in the fields. There was a large stretch of cleared ground, surrounding the meadows on the banks of the stream as if with a broad, encircling arm. This land until now had served as a pasture ground. New brush and a young, leafy wood had already replaced the old forest. Beside a tall stump which had lost its bark and grown as white as bone, which had hardened and dried, one would find groves of hazel, dense reaches of young hornbeam and beech, young oak-trees, as gleaming as well-fed colts, delightful thickets of truly wild shrubs of prickly blackthorn which had grown into trees, of hardy sumacs, of wild pears, of hawthorns and blackberry bushes. In the places where trees had been upheaved and the pits filled in and where the moisture was greatest, shot huge stalks of flowers, shoots of burdocks, impregnable barricades of wild raspberries and giant thistles. All this "old forest" now smoked with fires damped by ever fresh layers of branches, of stalks, of stumps and roots. The men worked cheerily and quickly in the fresh, rain-filled coolness. Everyone gladly took part in the strange happenings which he had before his eyes. The old forest would be gone! You would not go to the old forest for strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, pine-cones, and nuts, not any more, never fear!

Raphael built many plans on the yield of that field. He intended to sow it with oats and with them feed a stud of horses, which he continued mentally to increase in size. Just now, sitting on a stump, he puffed at a small clay-pipe and thought of his future stables. He had got a little wet about the collar and back and so he was warming himself with his pipe, with pleasant thoughts and a huddled posture. The smoke from the fires wandered over the already cleared fields and carried the fragrance of juniper over the freshly turned earth. Micik, working near by with the hired labourers, coughed



and straightened up. . . . He was mumbling something.

"What are you saying?" asked the lieutenant, without letting the pipe out of his mouth.

"I wish to announce—"

"What do you wish to announce, you old Austrian?"

"I—I—announce that a v—v—visitor is coming."

"You're mad, or what? A visitor to see me?"

"You can see someone coming down the hill."

"You're right! Someone is coming. A three-horse britzka."

"The b—b—britzka is n—n—not from these parts. It's a handsome wagon, a—Cracovian—"

"You're right! A Cracovian britzka. . . . The horses are splendid. . . ."

Downhill, over the pits and turns and boulders of the road, a substantial equipage was carefully making its way. One could see from afar that it was spattered high with mud. A pair of tall, sturdy horses ran in the traces. The third cantered loose for relay. In the seat, wrapped in a felt coat, rode the traveller. Raphael did not take his eyes from him. Presently he cried out: "Micik, Micik! Isn't that Mr. Cedro coming to see us?"

"I can't answer, for I've never seen Master Cedro with my eyes."

The britzka came nearer by a stadium, by two. Raphael stood on the stump. The traveller, seeing him, raised a pair of glasses to his eyes. Olbromski no longer doubted. With all his lungs he exclaimed: "Christopher, Christopher!"

They ran towards each other and fell in one another's arms, without words.

A few moments later Raphael was sitting with his friend in the britzka and hastening to his house. He told Micik to climb up on the box. He looked and looked at Cedro, who had changed from a tall, willowy youth into a muscular,

well-set man with a luxuriant, upturned moustache and abrupt, soldierly movements.

They had scarcely started when Raphael began to ask: "Where are you coming from now, little brother?"

"From home."

"When did you get back?"

"Our regiment had already crossed the Pyrenees back in March. From France I came by diligence, ahead of the regiment."

"And when did you reach Olshyna?"

"Not until June."

"And you were all this time with your father?"

"Until this very moment. I barely managed to tear myself away."

"But what a horse you have, blast him! What a horse!" Raphael could not restrain an outcry as he looked at the relay colt which ran beside the horses.

"An Iberian . . . and then they kept on feeding him in Olshyna," Cedro put in modestly.

"What an animal!"

"I had to take a good horse for so great an expedition."

"What great expedition now?"

Christopher looked at him askance and said: "The great war."

"Yes, of course," Raphael corrected himself. "I am so far from everything here."

"You have tucked yourself away indeed; I had a hard time of it to find you."

"So you're going again?"

"Are you fooling, brother, or asking for the road? Our fifth corps crossed the boundary in June."

"I don't know of anything. I sit here, I tell you, beyond

hills, beyond forests, I see hardly any people. . . . How should I? . . .”

“And so I came for you especially.”

“I am—I am very glad . . .” Olbromski muttered insincerely. “And what are your plans? When and where do you go on?”

“Tomorrow, of course. But where our seventh regiment can be I have no idea. Will you get ready today?”

“I!” shouted Raphael. “Are you mad? Look what work I have here! I am putting up a house.”

“You are putting up a house!” Cedro burst out in such merry and sounding laughter that Raphael flared up. But shame came over him at the same time.

“Well, what do you think?” he grumbled. “I took over the estate and I had to get to work some time. I can’t dally for ever.”

“You are beginning to work when all of us are starting out to war? Seventy thousand of ours have set out. . . .”

Olbromski almost wept. All at once an inexpressible regret came over him at the thought of these fields, these newly-cleared lands, these fences. He looked at the house gleaming white in the distance, amid the spreading trees.

“When is it you want to go?” he cried.

“As soon as you get ready. Tomorrow.”

“When I get ready! I don’t even have—”

“What don’t you have?”

“Horses . . .” he muttered evasively.

“You could take Samosilek.” Micik broke into the conversation, making on his box an adroit half-turn to the rear.

“Be still, fool! Keep your Samosilek for yourself.”

“As—as you say.”

“Who is he? Your equerry?”





## 51. The Word of Honour

IN the middle of August, at Orsha, the corps under the command of Prince Joseph Poniatovski united with the Grand Army.

There a general review was held. Cedro and Raphael Olbromski expected to see the Emperor. And they did. In the mist of a windy morning they saw him standing far, far off, on the rocky bank. Behind him gleamed the colourful uniforms of the staff and the taut, glistening horse-guards. The armies, filing by in the plain below, seeing the grey coat and the unadorned tricorn, burst into pealing huzzas like the salvos of cannon. Marching past were French, Dutch, Italian, German, Polish regiments. . . . All eyes were turned upon the short, stocky figure of the man in grey. Christopher Cedro did not take his staring eyes from him. For, lo, he sees, in waking life, the realization of his great dream. The Emperor has kept the word given at Madrid to the weakest of his soldiers, to the invalid dying in the field. For that one word he has united regiments, uniformed and fed them, and set them in motion. He has drawn foreign nations to his side. . . .

The staff withdrew. The fallow Arab was brought. The Emperor mounted him and came down from the hill. Guards rode in front of him, the retinue behind him, then guards once more. The defiling regiments stopped in the plain, deployed into lines, squares, elongated columns. He rode slowly before the straight fronts, passing his eyes over the human lines as if over mounds of lifeless earth, over palisades of wood, over fosses of stone. His face was cold and sullenly indifferent, like a slab of stone. The look of the eyes passed face after face, moved over the eyes of thousands as over a



lifeless trail. The dreadful eyes in which the human throngs had learned to see only joy and anger were at this moment neutral, indifferent, veiled with the vastness of distant thoughts.

His hand pulled the reins of the horse, and a command fell from his lips. The Emperor stopped. He raised his eyes. He looked into the regiment. He saw every face, he passed in turn over every one. He met the eyes, riveted upon him, of Christopher Cedro, eyes turned to stone with soldierly fealty, eyes sworn to undying faith. For a moment something glimmered in the hard orbs of the Emperor, like a distant gleam in a grey, formless, featureless cloud. Memory became a clear vision of reality. A fleeting, half-sad smile passed over the granite face. . . .

in 1922 was deferentially addressed by Joseph Conrad (his elder in years) as "the greatest living master" of Polish literature. As early as 1905 he was made the subject of a book, *O Stefan Zeromski*, by S. Brzozowski (Warsaw, 1905); and Jampolski's book (Lvov, 1918) was entitled *Stefan Zeromski, the Spiritual Leader of the Race. Ashes*, the first of his works to be translated into English—it was originally published in 1904—is generally regarded in Europe as one of the noblest pieces of writing expressive of the Slavic genius. The three volumes of the Polish original are here reduced to two by the excision, in the interests of clarity and readability, of several relatively unimportant passages.



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